NATION

By insulting Kangana, Cong offending every daughter, says PM

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Markets end lower after record peaks intra-day

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SPORTS

Indian compound mixed team enters final

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Delhi in focus as India votes in 6th phase today

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

India's election is heading towards its penultimate phase, with 11 crore voters from eight states and New Delhi poised to decide the fate of 889 candidates on Saturday.

The sixth phase will see all seven seats in the Indian capital region, a stronghold of the local governing Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), go to polls.

Among some prominent candidates, Kanhaiya Kumar, a former student leader is challenging sitting MP Manoj Tiwari, regional Bhojpuri language cinema actor and singer, in the North East Delhi.Polling for the Anantnag-Rajouri seat in Jammu and Kashmir will also be held on Saturday. The election there was postponed from phase three to six due to logistical issues owing to adverse weather conditions.

In a statement issued on Friday, the poll panel said the India Meteorological Department has predicted "no adverse impact" of cyclone in poll-going constituencies. But it gave no details. Some Lok Sabha and assembly seats in Odisha along with some parliamentary constituencies of West Bengal would also go for polls on Saturday in phase six. Election Commission has urged the voters in the urban centres, including Delhi, Gurugram and Faridabad to break the trend of urban apathy by coming out in large numbers to vote on Saturday.

Over 11.13 crore people, include 5.84 crore men, 5.29 crore women and 5,120 third gender electors, are eligible to vote in the sixth phase. The last phase of polling will be on 1 June for the remaining 57 seats with counting of votes scheduled on 4 June. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3&4

There are 5.29 crore women voters in Phase 6 ***PHOTO: PTI***

With 'hands-off' stance, SC backs EC on voter data

SC says it will be tough for EC to release booth-wise turnout

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Supreme Court on refused to issue directions to Election Commission (EC)on an NGO's plea for uploading polling booth-wise voter turnout data on its website during elections.

The apex court favoured a "hands-off attitude" amidst ongoing polls.

A vacation bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma adjourned the hearing on the application filed by 'Association for Democratic Reforms' and said it will be heard with the NGO's writ petition filed in 2019 after the elections.

It said everyone wants free and fair elections but "we are also concerned that there could be mischievous people looking to take advantage".

It said the 2024 elections are spread over seven phases out of which five are already over and the sixth is on 25 May.

The court will hear the plea after the end of polls ***PHOTO: PTI***

- It said everyone wants fair polls but "we are concerned that there could be people looking to take advantage".

"This particular compliance which you (NGO) are insisting upon would require not only manpower but also require mandamus (a judicial writ). It is not possible during this period," the top court said.

Senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for EC, questioned the maintainability of the interim application and claimed it has been filed on the basis of suspicion and false allegations.

The top court said the NGO's application is based on various press notes issued by EC on 2024 polls and asked can a court, by an interim order, grant a relief which is in the nature of a final relief while keeping the writ petition pending.

Dave submitted it is not an adversarial litigation and the NGO has approached the court for a genuine public cause as EC, after the first two phases of polling, came out with a voter turnout figure which was substantially higher than what it had initially given.

Dave said these are public interest litigation proceedings where strict rules of procedure, pleadings etc do not apply.

"We are not so strict on PILs if they involve a public cause," the bench said but added that the apex court has often come across PILs which have "private interest".

The judges said it is the court which is raising questions on procedural grounds and not the poll panel.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra, said the returning officers of all 543 Lok Sabha constituencies can easily manage to upload the voter turnout data. *—PTI*

OVER DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT

Prajwal gets MEA show-cause notice

S Jaishankar and Prajwal Revanna ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has served a show-cause notice to suspended JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna asking why his diplomatic passport should not be cancelled as sought by Karnataka government in view of allegations of sexual abuse against him, people familiar with the matter said on Friday.

Official sources on Thursday had said MEA is processing Karnataka government's request to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. Currently, he is believed to be in Germany.

The show-cause notice has been served on Prajwal as part of the process initiated to cancel his passport, the people cited above said.

It is learnt that the show-cause notice was served through email and MEA is undertaking the process to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. If the passport is cancelled, then Prajwal's stay abroad will be illegal and he may face legal action by concerned authorities in the country he is staying, a person familiar with the matter said.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wrote a second letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to take "prompt and necessary" actions to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport.

Earlier this month, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Prajwal travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and he did not seek political clearance for the trip.

Prajwal's father HD Revanna, a former Karnataka minister, was also booked on charges of sexual harassment and criminal intimidation. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

SIT helpline gets 30 calls

Special Investigation Team (SIT) gets calls from more than 30 victims probing alleged sex scandal involving JD (S) MP Prajwal Revanna, according to sources. Sources said that none of the victims want to lodge a police complaint as they are frightened even after assuring protection. SIT has established a helpline for victims due to the seriousness of the case.

50 Uttarakhand Chardham pilgrims dead in a fortnight

DEHRADUN, 24 MAY

At least 50 pilgrims have died so far since the start of the Chardham Yatra in Uttarakhand nearly a fortnight ago on 10 May. Garhwal Commissioner Vinay Shankar Pandey said, "52 pilgrims have died so far, mostly due to heart attacks. Most of them were above 60 years." Three devotees died in Gangotri, 12 in Yamunotri, 14 in Badrinath and 23 in Kedarnath. Medical screening for devotees above 50 years of age has been made mandatory. The screening is being done en route to the Himalayan temples, and pilgrims are being advised not to travel if they are not found medically fit enough, he said. However, if they still insist on continuing the yatra, they are allowed to go further. *—PTI*

India to get next-gen nuclear fuel: Russia

MOSCOW, 24 MAY

Russian state nuclear corporation-Rosatom head Alexey Likhachev said that India will get next-generation nuclear fuel this summer, further calling India a key partner in the nuclear area, reported Russia Today(RT). Atomic Energy Commission chairman Ajit Kumar Mohanty was hosted by the Russian Atomic Chief in Siberia's Tomsk region in Russia on Thursday. The Russian Atomic Chief showed Mohanty the fourth-generation site that will host the safest atomic reactor in history, RT-India reported. *—PTI*

Guj villagers block highway, cops hurl tear gas

HIMMATNAGAR, 24 MAY

Police lobbed around 90 tear gas shells after villagers blocked a busy highway and went on a rampage near Himmatnagar town in Gujarat's Sabarkantha district on Friday for nearly half an hour following the death of a local resident in a road accident, an official said. The incident took place on National Highway 48 when a youth from Gamdi village died on the spot after being hit by a speeding car in the morning, he said. Sabarkantha district Superintendent of Police, Vijay Patel, said residents of Gamdi village were already angry because of the delay in construction of a flyover near their village."- Following the death of a youngster from Gamdi village in a road accident, the villagers came on to the road and blocked it. *—PTI*

Medha Patkar convicted in defamation case

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The Saket District Court of Delhi on Friday convicted Narmada Bachao Andolan activist Medha Patkar in a 2001 defamation case filed by VK Saxena, who is now Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG).

The Metropolitan Magistrate while passing the Judgement stated that it is clear that the accused's actions were deliberate and malicious, aimed at tarnishing the complainant's good name, and have indeed caused substantial harm to his standing and credit in the eyes of the public.

The accused's statements, calling the complainant a coward, not a patriot, and alleging his involvement in hawala transactions, were not only defamatory per se but also crafted to incite negative perceptions.

The court said the accusation that the complainant was mortgaging the people of Gujarat and their resources to foreign interests was a direct attack on his integrity and public service. Patkar and Saxena have been embroiled in a legal battle since 2000 after she filed a suit against him for publishing advertisements against her and the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Saxena was then the chief of the National Council for Civil Liberties, an Ahmedabad-based NGO.

Medha Patkar ***PHOTO: PTI***

Saxena was the president of the National Council of Civil Liberties, which was involved in issues pertaining to public interest, exposing unfair trade practices adopted by all companies and also bringing to fore large scale, evasion of sales tax in inter-state transactions. *—ANI*

21 i'ntl panels write to CJI on Adani coal scam

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

At least 21 international organisations have written to Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and requested the Supreme Court to speedily resolve the pending case filed by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, investigating Adani Group firms for alleged overvaluation of Indonesian coal imports.

The letter comes after a report by the London-based Financial Times, citing documents from George Soros-backed Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), alluded to a "fraud" by the Adani Group by selling low-grade coal as high-value fuel in 2013.

Contending that they stand firmly against the continued use of fossil fuels, the organisations said the Financial Times report provided fresh and detailed evidence of the passing off of "low-quality coal as far more expensive cleaner fuel" by the Adani Group in transactions with Tamil Nadu's Tangedco. The 21 international organisations that have written to Chief Justice Chandrachud are Australian Centre for International Justice, Banktrack, Bob Brown Foundation, Culture Unstained, Eko, Extinction Rebellion, Friends of the Earth Australia, London Mining Network, Mackay Conservation Group, Market Forces, Money Rebellion, Move Beyond Coal, Seniors for Climate Action Now, Stand.earth, Stop Adani, Sunrise Movement, Tipping Point, Toxic Bonds, Transparency International Australia, W&J Nagana Yarrbayn Cultural Custodians, and Queensland Conservation Council. *—PTI*

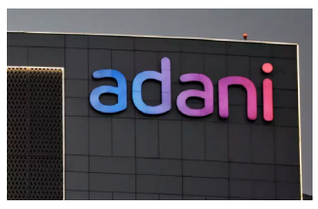


PHOTO: PTI

SUMMERY TREAT

Visitors enjoy mangoes during an annual mango and jackfruit mela at Lalbagh Botanical Garden in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

MUM ON CEASEFIRE

Stop attacking Rafah: ICJ to Israel

THE HAGUE, 24 MAY

The top United Nations court ordered Israel on Friday to immediately halt its military offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. However, it stopped short of ordering a ceasefire for the enclave.

While Israel is unlikely to comply with the order, it will ratchet up the pressure on the increasingly isolated country.

Criticism of Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza has been growing, particularly once it turned its focus to Rafah.

While the ruling by International Court of Justice is a blow to Israel's international standing, it does not have a police force to enforce its orders. Russia has so far ignored a 2022 order by the court to halt its invasion of Ukraine.

Earlier, Israel signaled it, too, would brush off an ICJ order to stop its operations.

Immediately after the ruling, Netanyahu announced that he would hold a special ministerial meeting to decide how to respond.

The court calls on Israel to allow international investigators to enter the enclave to conduct inquiries. It also orders the Rafah crossing to be opened for unhindered provision of humanitarian aid.

The ICJ asks Israel to report back to the court within one month on its progress in applying measures ordered by it. Rafah is in the southernmost part of the Gaza Strip, on the border with Egypt, and over 1 million people sought refuge there in recent months after fleeing fighting elsewhere, with many of them living in teeming tent camps. Israel has been vowing for months to invade

Israel started issuing evacuation orders about two weeks ago as it began operations on the edge of the city. Since then, the army says an estimated 1 million people have left as forces press deeper inside.

The ceasefire request is part of a case filed late last year by South Africa accusing Israel of committing genocide during its Gaza campaign. *—AP*

1 MORE HELD IN RAMESHWARAM BLAST

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday arrested one more accused in the 1 March Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case, the fifth person to be held in the matter. Thirty-five-year-old Shoaib Ahmed Mirza alias Chhotu, a resident of Hubbali city in Karnataka, was previously convicted in a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror conspiracy case, the agency said in a statement. NIA investigations revealed that Mirza got involved in this fresh conspiracy after being released from jail. Meanwhile, Food safety authorities of Telangana have found expired stocks of Black gram (Urad dal) and some dairy items on the premises of Rameshwaram Café. *—PTI*

US Ambassador visits B'luru in 1st official trip

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Eric Garcetti, the US Ambassador to India, on Friday arrived here on his first official trip and visited Science Gallery Bengaluru.

In a post on 'X, he said he was delighted to meet Jahnavi Phalkey, the founding director of Science Gallery Bengaluru and the team.

Garcetti said that during the state visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US in 2023, he and US President Joe Biden announced the opening of two more consulates in India. He also asked Bengalureans to send him their ideas and added that he will send the report back to the US. *—PTI*

4 killed, 6 injured after car falls off Haveri bridge

HAVERI, 24 MAY

Four people were killed and six suffered serious injuries after a car fell off a bridge and crashed onto the service road on Friday near Ranebennur town in Haveri. The deceased are Suresh 45; Ishwarya 22; Chetana 7; and Prameela 28. The victims were residents of Ashwini Nagar in Haveri City and were travelling to Tirupati on a pilgrimage. The incident occurred at the Halageri Bridge on National Highway 48 after the driver lost control of the vehicle. Three people died on the spot, and Prameela succumbed to her injuries at the hospital. Channaveerappa Jaadi, Savithra Jaadi, Vikas Barki, Prabhuraj Samagandi, Geetha Barki, and Honnappa Barki suffered serious injuries and are being treated at the hospital. The Ranebennur Traffic Police have registered a case and are investigating the matter. Former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai reacting to the tragedy said that he is saddened by the incident. "I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured persons. I demand that the government provide compensation for the families of the deceased and injured," he said.

—Salar News

Mysuru filmmaker bags Cannes La Cinef first prize

CANNES, 24 MAY

In a major triumph for India at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, Chidananda S Naik's 'Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know', has won the first prize of La Cinef. Mysuru doctor-turned filmmaker made the film at the end of his one-year course in the television wing of Pune's Film and Television Institute of India. 'Sunflowers' is based on Kannada folk tale about an old woman who steals a rooster. As a result of her action, the son stops rising in the village. The third prize of La Cinef competition on Thursday went to India-born Mansi Maheshwari's animation film 'Bunnyhood'. Maheshwari, born in from Meerut and an ex-student of NIFT Delhi, made the film as a student of UK's National Film and Television School. The second prize was shared by "Out of the Widow Through the Wall", directed by Columbia University's Asya Segalovich.*—PTI*

Mandya Sanctuary: Less food, drought drives away birds

MANDYA, 24 MAY

Mandya is home to renowned Kokkarebelluru Bird Sanctuary, a special habitat for long-billed storks. However, this year, the sanctuary has not witnessed its usual arrival of majestic birds, leading concern among bird lovers and environmentalists. Unfortunately, severe drought conditions have dried up reservoirs, rivers, and lakes, depriving the storks of their primary food source—fish. The scarcity of food has resulted in significantly fewer birds making their way this season. In addition to the drought, the sanctuary faces other challenges. The number of trees in the area is dwindling, reducing available nesting sites for the birds. Moreover, sand mining in sanctuary's river further exacerbates the problem by disrupting the habitat. *—Salar News*

Lightening kills college student in Udupi

UDUPI, 24 MAY

A 20-year-old college student lost his life after being struck by lightning near Shirva Manibettu in Udupi taluk here, police said on Friday. The student, Rakshit Poojary, lost his life in the incident that occurred late Thursday night, they said. According to the police, Poojary was standing near the outdoor washroom of his house when lightning struck him. He was rushed to Kasturba hospital in Manipal but he could not be saved. Police have filed a report and are investigating. Poojary hailed from Totadamane in Shirva Manibettu. He was a second-year Bachelor of Computer Applications (BCA) student at MSRS College in Shirva. *—PTI*

BJP mocks 'Udta B'luru', HM hits back

BJP calls City 'adda' for rave over recent raid

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Hitting out at Siddaramaiah-led Congress government for the alleged "deteriorating law and order situation" in the State, BJP termed the Silicon City as "Udta Bengaluru" and alleged the City is becoming the "adda" for narcotic substances and rave parties.

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Friday said it was not right on the part of Opposition to say Bengaluru is becoming "Udta Bengaluru" and should not cast aspersions.

The development comes after the Bengaluru police busted a rave party at a farmhouse near Electronics City where 103 people had allegedly gathered. Of them, 86 people, including two Telugu film actors, tested positive for narcotics, according to police.

BJP on X has alleged that since Congress government came to power in Karnataka, "immoral gatherings" were happening everywhere in Bengaluru.

Oppn shouldn't cast aspersions says G Parameshwara *PHOTO: PTI*

He told media, "Statements like Udta Bengaluru should not have been made after the State government took action against the drug peddlers. They (BJP) should not issue statements which can tarnish the image of Bengaluru."

Referring to drug seizures in the City, he said the government has seized thousands of kilograms of ganja. "MDMA and other synthetic drugs have also been confiscated. Many foreign students involved in drug peddling have been deported, and cases have been booked against the drug peddlers," he said.

BJP also used a poster featuring Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar with the hashtags #BadBengaluru and #CongressFailsKarnataka to hit out at the state government.

BJP used "Udta Bengaluru" in reference to the 2016 Bollywood movie 'Udta Punjab', which highlighted drug abuse by youth in Punjab.

—Salar News with Agencies

BJP BLAMES 'SLEEPING' GOVT

BJP, Cong trade barbs as Google picks TN for factory

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday lashed out at BJP leaders for allegedly spreading lies about the investment scenario in the State.

He was reacting to BJP State President BY Vijayendra's charge that Karnataka is bearing the direct consequences of a 'lethargic and sleeping Congress government.' Vijayendra's remark came in the wake of news that Google would produce smart phones and drones in neighbouring Tamil Nadu.

Responding to the allegations he said, "BJP leaders must state facts. Lakhs of industrialists, businessmen have fled the country due to BJP's misgovernance in the State. Investors have now shown interest in the State after Congress government came to power. Our Industries Minister and IT minister are doing an excellent job. The whole country knows that Karnataka is the land of prosperity, progress and peace. The whole world is looking up to Bengaluru and Karnataka."

DK Shivakumar and BY Vijayendra *PHOTO: PTI*

Vijayendra had said on X that Google is set to invest billions in Tamil Nadu to produce smart phones and drones.

"Karnataka is bearing the direct consequences of a lethargic, sleeping Congress 'Sarkaara' (government) that has completely lost its way looking directionless & driving the state towards a disaster owing to its misgovernance & misplaced priorities," he said.

While the Centre has succeeded in attracting investments to India, Congress in Karnataka has failed miserably in showcasing Karnataka as a "top investment destination", Vijayendra said.

- BJP leaders must state facts. Lakhs of industrialists, businessmen have fled the country due to BJP's misgovernance in the State

"This is the same government that ruined farmers and failed to defend our share of Cauvery water in favour of its alliance partner DMK (in Tamil Nadu)." he added.

—Salar News with agencies

B'luru sees jump in IT job opportunities: Report

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Even as overall job opportunities in the IT sector declined by 3.6 per cent nationwide, openings gained traction in technology hubs Bengaluru and Hyderabad that saw a growth of 24 per cent and 41.5 per cent, respectively, during April, a report said on Friday.

According to data from Indeed, job postings in the IT sector have increased 24 per cent in Bengaluru, highlighting the growing prominence of these cities as top destinations for IT professionals.

There has also been a rise in job seeker interest by 80 per cent in Bengaluru, the report added.

Overall, there has been a decrease in IT job opportunities nationally, with job postings declining by 3.6 per cent, indicating that tech companies are being cautious in hiring due to the uncertain global economic climate, said the report.

The report is based on data related to job postings and job clicks on Indeed's platform in April compared to that of the corresponding month in 2023.

The report further revealed that the rise in top five job postings are for skills in analysis, agile, APIs, javascript and SQL. *—PTI*

Bengaluru Airport City unveils Business Park, 775-room hotel

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Bengaluru Airport City, which is all set to be transformed as Bengaluru Airport City Limited (BACL), on Friday unveiled investment plans for a two million square feet business park, concert arena and 775-room hotel near Kempegowda International Airport.

BACL is the subsidiary wholly owned by Bangalore International Airport Limited, which operates the KIA.

In a statement, BACL said that in a positive stride towards sustainability and technological innovation, biophilic-inspired business park promises smart workspace. According to them, the project's most exceptional and breath-taking attribute lies in Urban Forest, a lush oasis in the centre of the development.

The upcoming Metro station in Airport City will provide seamless connectivity to the business park from the northern side, ensuring convenient accessibility. *—PTI*

EAM REVEALS

'MEA got request to impound Prajwal's passport on 21 May'

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

In a significant revelation External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has disclosed that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) received a request only on 21 May to impound the passport of Janata Dal Secular MP Prajwal Revanna, who fled to Germany last month amid allegations of sexual assault.

Revanna is facing a probe by a Special Investigative Team (SIT) constituted by Karnataka government over allegations of sexual harassment and criminal intimidation following a complaint by a woman who worked in his household.

In an exclusive interview with ANI, Jaishankar clarified the procedural aspects, saying, "To impound a passport is governed by an act called the Passport Act.

We need a judicial court or a police request to do so. The MEA got this request from Karnataka only on 21 May."

Asked about Congress government's accusations against BJP of shielding Revanna, Jaishankar said, "They did not take the first step... I mean, he's not the first case where impounding a passport is taking place."

PHOTO: PTI

It's a family matter: DKS

Meanwhile, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that it is a "family matter" of the Gowdas and he will not be "intervening" into it. Responding to a reporter about the letter written by the Janata Dal Secular patron to Hassan MP, Shivakumar said, "I am sorry it is a family matter.

I don't want to intervene." On Thursday, JDS supremo and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda issued a stern warning to his grandson Revanna to return to India and face the law in the obscene video case.

In a letter posted on X, the former PM says he is not aware of where his grandson is but has warned him to return home and face the law. *—ANI*

HDK diluting case with allegations against DKS: CM

MYSURU, 24 MAY

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said JD (S) second-in-command and former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy is trying to dilute the rape and sexual offence charges against his nephew and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna by "talking gibberish" against Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and others.

He alleged that the JD (S) first family of former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda helped him flee the country.

Siddaramaiah also said the Prime Minister's office did not respond to his two letters for cancellation of Prajwal's diplomatic passport. A 'Blue Corner Notice' seeking information on his whereabouts has already been issued by the Interpol, following a request by the SIT via the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). *—PTI*

Child body seeks helpline to ease school admissions

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Child Rights Trust urges Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa to create a helpline that will guide parents during the school enrolment months such as May and June.

In a letter, Nagasimha G Rao—the director of the non-profit organisation that fights for child rights—said, in rural areas parents face confusion over if the school is a government schools or not.

He said that schools lie to the parents about them being recognised. "Also there is no one to inform the parents about the schools background, fees, if the school uses state textbooks, if the school is recognised by the Central government?," he said.

He said the helpline would help parents by offering the necessary information on non-government schools including details such as the year of establishment, government recognition status, pass rates, teacher qualifications, fee structure, transportation availability, and child protection policies.

The letter emphasises that such a helpline, operational from April to June, would improve access to education for millions of children in State. *—Salar News*

High-speed rail takes Hajj pilgrims from Mecca to Medina in 2 hrs instead of 10

DANIEL GEORGE
BENGALURU, 24 MAY

For the first time, Indian Hajj pilgrims will reach the holy city of Medina in Haramain Train, a high-speed rail, from Mecca in just two hours. It takes about 10 hours' drive to reach Mecca from Medina but with the introduction of high speed train service, it will cut down travel time by eight hours.

It is among the top 10 fastest trains in the world *PHOTO: SALAR*

The train is among the world's top 10 fastest. The 450-km-long service aims to transport about 60 million passengers annually.

About 50 times a day these sleek, long-nosed javelins shoot across the baking-hot deserts of Saudi Arabia, reaching speeds of up to 300 kph (186 mph) carrying pilgrims and other passengers.

Currently, 35 trains with 13 cars and 417 seats will run on tracks. The seats will be made available in two classes, namely business and economy, and people can book accordingly.

They are designed to handle soaring temperatures up to 50°C, which is also the maximum temperature recorded in Saudi Arabia.

Diplomatic sources at the Indian Consulate in Jeddah told Salar News that this year most Indian pilgrims are being accommodated in Markazi, central area of Medina, near to the Prophet's Mosque. Indian pilgrims will also be accommodated in Zone One to Four in Mina. A total of 1,75,025 pilgrims are going on the Hajj pilgrimage and among them 1,40,020 pilgrims have been facilitated by the Indian Central Hajj Committee.

Every day 4,000 pilgrims arrive in Saudi Arabia, and move from Medina to Mecca. Diplomats told Salar news that 52,000 pilgrims have reached Saudi Arabia so far and among them 30,000 have camped in Medina.

—Salar News

Kharge: How will BJP get 400 seats when it's losing?

KALABURAGI, 24 MAY

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday wondered how Prime Minister Narendra Modi was raising the slogan of winning over 400 seats when BJP was losing everywhere.

He said there is every possibility of INDIA bloc getting a majority.

Talking to reporters in his hometown Kalaburagi, Kharge said people have provided a good environment in favour of INDIA alliance.

It is an election between the people and Modi because people are frustrated today, especially due to price rise and high unemployment, he said. Also, there is a big assault happening on democracy and Indian constitution,

Mallikarjun Kharge *PHOTO: PTI*

Congress president added. He said BJP is running the administration by misusing the autonomous bodies, due to which people are upset with them and are supporting INDIA bloc; hence, the alliance has a good opportunity.

Asking people to wait till 4 June when the results will be out, he said the next course of action will be decided based on the outcome of election results. —PTI

DKS warns officials over potable water quality

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has issued a strict warning to officials, stating that severe consequences will follow if the quality of potable water is not upheld. The warning comes in response to reports of waterborne illnesses linked to contaminated water from various parts of the State.

In an official letter addressed to BBMP Commissioner, CEO of Bengaluru Zilla Panchayat, and the Chairman of BWSSB, Shivakumar stated, "All officials concerned must ensure quality potable water to the people of Bengaluru. The officials will be held responsible and face action."

In his letter, Shivakumar instructed officials to conduct thorough inspections of all drinking water facilities.

—Salar News

ALL FOR INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES

Casteism led to my failed love story: CM

MYSURU, 24 MAY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah opened up to the public at an event here on Thursday night, recalling his failed 'love story' due to casteism in society.

During an event on inter-caste marriage on the occasion of 'Buddha Purnima', the full moon night when Gautam Buddha was born, he went on a flashback to his college days.

"I wanted to have an inter-caste marriage but it did not happen. The girl did not accept it," Siddaramaiah said.

Siddaramaiah *PHOTO: PTI*

Elaborating further, he said, "When I was studying I had fallen in love with a girl. Don't mistake me. I had thought of marrying her but her family and also the girl did not agree. Hence, the marriage did not happen. A situation emerged where I had to marry a girl from my caste only. My marriage happened within my community," he said.

This candidness was met with audience's claps, laughter and cheer.

Extending his full support and cooperation to inter-caste marriages, Siddaramaiah promised that his government will offer all assistance for inter-caste marriages.

According to him, efforts to abolish casteism and build equality in society have been happening since the time of Gautama Buddha and 12th Century AD social reformer from Karnataka, Lord Basaveshwara.

"There are two ways to abolish casteism – one is inter-caste marriages and second one is socio-economic empowerment among all communities. Social equality cannot happen in a society without socio-economic upliftment," he said. *—PTI*

BBMP & local body elections post LS polls: CM

MYSURU, 24 MAY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said process to hold the local body elections Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) will start soon after counting of votes for Lok Sabha elections.

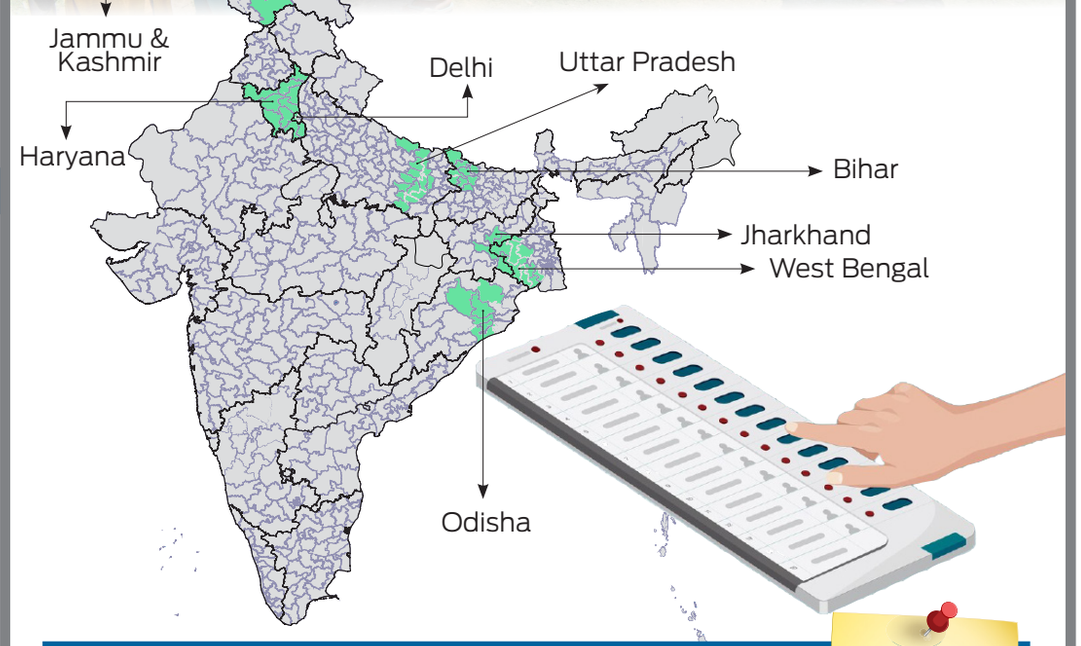
He said the delimitation of wards has happened and reservation of wards will be the next step. "We are ready to hold district and taluk panchayat elections. After the counting of votes, we will conduct gram panchayat, taluk panchayat and district panchayat elections. We will also conduct Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike elections," Siddaramaiah said.

"When he was told that the deadline was January, by which time the delimitation process should have been completed, Siddaramaiah said he will hold a discussion and conduct the election as per rules.

Regarding making his son Yathindra Siddaramaiah a Member of Legislative Council, he said it is left to the high command, it will make him a member of upper house Karnataka legislature. *—PTI*

POLLS EDGE TOWARDS FINALE

889 candidates are set to contest across 58 seats in Phase 6



BIHAR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 86

Total Phases: 7 | Phase 6 Seats: 8

Constituencies: Valmiki Nagar, Paschim Champaran, Purvi Champaran, Sheohar, Vaishali, Gopalganj, Siwan & Maharajganj

KEY PLAYERS

SANJAY JAISWAL, BJP
Seat: Paschim Champaran

The constituency is a bastion of BJP with veteran leader and sitting MP Sanjay Jaiswal winning three consecutive terms since the constituency was formed in 2008. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, he won by a margin of around 3 lakh votes.

VIJAY KUMAR SHUKLA, RJD
Seat: Vaishali

Gangster-turned-politician Vijay Kumar Shukla alias Munna Shukla belongs to Bhumihar, a politically dominant caste in the seat. Shukla is using lack of development as a poll issue.

DELHI

NO OF CANDIDATES: 162

Total Phases: 1 | Phase 6 Seats: 7

Constituencies: Chandni Chowk, North East Delhi, East Delhi, New Delhi, North West Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi

KEY PLAYERS

KANHAIYA KUMAR, CONGRESS
Seat: North East Delhi

The former president of JNU Students' Union rose to fame after his speech about freedom from corruption and discrimination on campus in 2016. In 2019 election, he contested from Begusarai on CPI ticket but lost to BJP.

KAMALJEET SEHRAWAT, BJP
Seat: West Delhi

Sehrawat held various positions from district vice-president of Najafgarh to secretary, president of Mahila Morcha, and Delhi BJP vice-president. During her tenure as South Delhi mayor, she focused on enhancing infrastructure.

HARYANA

NO OF CANDIDATES: 223

Total Phases: 1 | Phase 6 Seats: 10

Constituencies: Ambala, Kurukshetra, Sirsa, Hisar, Karnal, Sonipat, Rohtak, Bhiwani-Mahendragarh, Gurgaon, Faridabad

KEY PLAYERS

MANOHAR LAL KHATTAR, BJP
Seat: Karnal

Former chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar is contesting Lok Sabha election for first time. The seat has been the bastion of Congress, which won 11 times since 1952, but from 2014 BJP has been winning from here with record margins.

DEEPENDER SINGH HOODA, CONGRESS
Seat: Rohtak

Rohtak is considered as a bastion of Hooda family as Deepender's father Bhupinder Singh Hooda has represented the seat four times, his grandfather Ranbir Singh Hooda twice. He focuses on improving Rohtak's infrastructure.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 20

Total Phases: 5
Phase 6 Seats: 1
Constituencies: Anantnag-Rajouri

KEY PLAYERS

MEHBOOBA MUFTI, PDP
Seat: Anantnag-Rajouri

PDP President Mufti had represented Anantnag twice in Parliament. Mufti was the first woman to hold the office of Chief Minister in Jammu & Kashmir when she formed a coalition government with BJP in 2016. She is squaring off in a triangular fight with National Conference's Mian Altaf and Apni Party's Zaffar Iqbal Manhas, which has the backing of BJP.

MIAN ALTAF AHMAD, National Conference
Seat: Anantnag-Rajouri

Mian Altaf Ahmad is a spiritual leader revered by Gujjar and Bakerwal communities. Ahmad's family has never lost an election, including himself and his father Mian Bashir and grandfather Mian Nizam ud din, though their political loyalties have shifted between National Conference and Congress.

JHARKHAND

NO OF CANDIDATES: 93

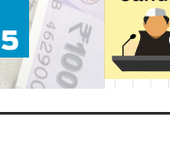
Total Phases: 4
Phase 6 Seats: 4
Constituencies: Giridih, Dhanbad, Ranchi, Jamshedpur

KEY PLAYERS

SAMIR MOHANTY, JMM
Seat: Jamshedpur

Samir Mohanty, the sitting MLA from Baharagora, is facing Bidyut Baran Mahato who has won from Jamshedpur in the last two General Elections. JMM is betting on Mahto community that Mohanty belongs to. Mahto community constitutes 22% of the electorate.

SANJAY SETH, BJP
Seat: Ranchi



Having won from Ranchi with a margin of around 3 lakh votes in 2019, Sanjay Seth is eyeing a second consecutive term in this year's Lok Sabha elections. Seth began his political journey by becoming a member of Local Board of State Bank of India, Patna, and Jharkhand in 2005.

ODISHA

NO OF CANDIDATES: 64

Total Phases: 4 | Phase 6 Seats: 6

Constituencies: Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Cuttack, Puri, Bhubaneswar

KEY PLAYERS

ARUP PATNAIK, BJD
Seat: Puri

Former Mumbai police commissioner Arup Patnaik is facing BJP's candidate in Odisha Sambit Patra. He is trying his luck for the second time in electoral politics as he was defeated by 21,000 votes by BJP's Aparajita Sarangi in 2019.

DHARMENDRA PRADHAN, BJP
Seat: Sambalpur

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is facing three-time MLA Pranab Prakash Das, considered to be the No.2, in BJD. Pradhan has held the position of Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas for the longest time.

UTTAR PRADESH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 162

Total Phases: 7 | Phase 6 Seats: 14

Constituencies: Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Phulpur, Allahabad, Ambedkar Nagar, Shrawasti, Domariyaganj, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Lalganj, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Machhlishahr, Bhadohi

KEY PLAYERS

DHARMENDRA YADAV, SP
Seat: Azamgarh

A three-time MP in Lok Sabha, Dharmendra Yadav was defeated by BJP candidate Dinesh Lal Yadav in a bypoll in 2022. This time, it is a repeat of the contest held in 2022 as same opponents face again.

MANEKA GANDHI, BJP
Seat: Sultanpur

Maneka Gandhi, an animal rights activist and environmentalist, has won a plethora of international awards and acclaim. Looking to enter Lok Sabha for ninth time, Maneka has been a minister in four governments, the last one being Modi's from May 2014 to May 2019.

WEST BENGAL

NO OF CANDIDATES: 79

Total Phases: 7 | Phase 6 Seats: 8

Constituencies: Tamluk, Kanthi, Ghatal, Jhargram, Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura, Bishnupur

KEY PLAYERS

ABHIJIT GANGOPADHYAY, BJP
Seat: Tamluk

Abhijit Gangopadhyay joined BJP just days after he retired as judge of Calcutta High Court. He is a known TMC critic who has handled important cases including the teachers' recruitment scam as a judge of Calcutta High Court.

DEEPAK ADHIKARI, TMC
Seat: Ghatal

Bengali cine star Deepak Adhikari aka Dev is eyeing a hat-trick of victories for TMC in this year's Lok Sabha elections. This time Dev is pitted against another film actor, Hiran Chatterjee of BJP, and Tapan Ganguly of CPI(M) who is supported by Congress.

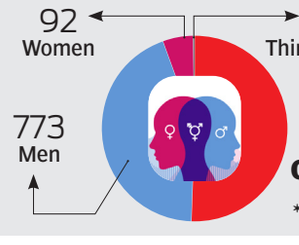
CANDIDATES WITH HIGHEST ASSETS

Naveen Jindal, BJP
Kurukshetra (Haryana)
₹1,241 cr

Santrupt Misra, BJD
Cuttack (Odisha)
₹482 cr

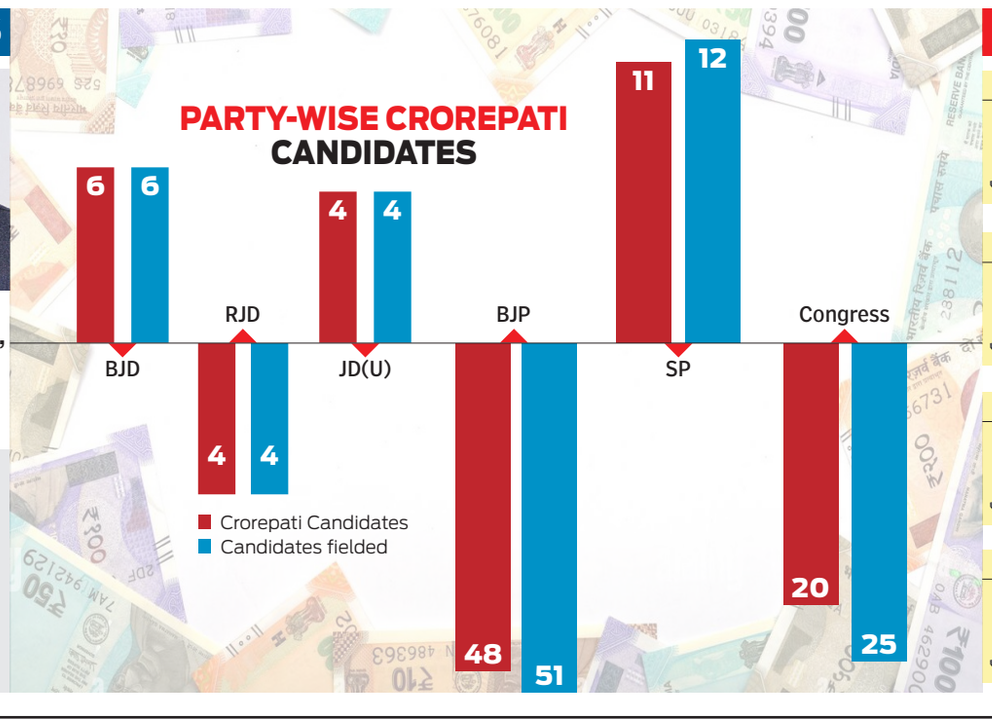
Sushil Gupta, AAP
Kurukshetra (Haryana)
₹169 cr

GENDER ANALYSIS



866 **Total Candidates**
*excluding J&K

PARTY-WISE CROREPATI CANDIDATES



CRIMINAL CASES

	Candidates	Criminal cases
HARYANA	223	27
UTTAR PRADESH	162	38
DELHI	162	25
JHARKHAND	91	28
BIHAR	85	24
WEST BENGAL	79	20
ODISHA	64	18
JAMMU AND KASHMIR	20	3

PHOTO: PTI

26K displaced KPs to vote at 34 special poll stations

JAMMU, 24 MAY

More than 26,000 displaced Kashmiri Pandit voters from across the country are eligible to vote at 34 polling stations in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag constituency on Saturday. This marks the conclusion of voting in the Union Territory, with polling already completed in the other four constituencies. The newly created Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat, covering the south Kashmir-Pir Panjal region, will cover the districts of Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian, Rajouri and Poonch. The Anantnag constituency is preparing for a competitive electoral showdown with nearly 18.36 lakh voters, including 9.02 lakh women, set to vote at 2,338 polling stations. Twenty candidates are vying for the seat.—*PTI*

Excise scam: ED opposes Kavitha's bail plea

BALLIA, 24 MAY

ED opoosed the bail plea of BRS leader K Kavitha in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam on Friday. It told Delhi High Court, her release would adversely affect further investigation to unearth the "deep-rooted, multi-layered conspiracy." ED, in its reply to Kavitha's bail plea, contended that the Telangana lawmaker is a "highly influential" individual and stands accused of having committed a grave economic offence. She has the potential to tamper with evidence and influence witnesses, it said."K Kavitha has conspired with other people and actively involved in payment of kickbacks to the tune of Rs 100 crore and then in establishing the money laundering ecosystem," the probe agency said in its counter affidavit.—*PTI*

UP: Guard on election duty in Sultanpur dies

SULTANPUR, 24 MAY

A Home Guard personnel, who was on poll duty, has died, police said on Friday. Pawan Kumar, 48, health suddenly deteriorated under suspicious circumstances on Thursday. The Home Guard personnel was taken to the district hospital when his health deteriorated but the doctor declared him dead upon arrival, Station House Officer (SHO) Satendra Kumar Singh said. The body of the deceased has been sent for post-mortem and his family has been informed, SHO Singh said. According to the police, Kumar was a resident of Meerut district. He, along with a group of security personnel, was deployed at a polling station and was residing at a private school . —*PTI*

'Boycott polls' posters put up in DU; FIRs filed

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Two FIRs were filed after posters of slogans to boycott the Lok Sabha elections in the national capital were found on the walls at multiple points of the sprawling Delhi University campus on Thursday, police said. All seven seats in the Capital will poll in the penultimate phase on 25 May. Meanwhile, on Thursday, two colleges affiliated to the Delhi University received an anonymous call, threatening explosions, officials said, adding that upon investigation, the call was determined to be bogus. According to the Delhi Fire Service, calls threatening explosions were received by Lady Shri Ram College and Sri Venkateswara College in the national capital. Later, the Delhi Police informed that the calls were bogus and there was no need to worry." an officer said. —*ANI*

By insulting Kangana, Cong offending every daughter, says PM

He calls Kangana aspiration to daughters

MANDI, 24 MAY

Coming out in defence of actor-turned-politician and BJP candidate from Mandi, Kangana Ranaut, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing a rally in Himachal Pradesh called Congress party as "anti-women".

Modi, on Friday, conducted an election rally in Himachal's Mandi in support of BJP candidate Kanagana who is pitted against Congress leader Vikramaditya Singh.

Rallying support for BJP candidate Kangana, Modi said, "The way Congress has insulted Kangana is an insult to Mandi. It's an insult to Himachal and every daughter of Himachal."

"Our daughters are flying drones in farms and fighter planes. Kangana is not just BJP's candidate but she reflects the aspirations of our nation's daughters, showing they can succeed in any new field they enter. The Congress party's insults to Kangana are insults to Mandi, Himachal, and every daughter of the state," Modi said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidate Kangana Ranaut in her constituency Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

"Congress could not reach the 21st century. People move forward, Congress moves backwards. This is going back to the 20th century. The royal family of Congress is extremely anti-daughter, Congress is anti-women," he added.

Highlighting the significance of Palampur, which is located 91 kilometres from Mandi, Modi reminisced about the pivotal decision regarding the Ram Mandir which was made there.

"Palampur is not very far from here. Today, I want to remind that there was a meeting of BJP Working Committee in Palampur. The decision taken there created history. In this same session, BJP resolved to build a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya. 500 years of the struggle and the sacrifice of so many people has ended. This could happen only because of your vote."

—*PTI*

Remark against Agnipath not MCC violation: Cong to EC

EC has told parties not to politicise Army

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Days after the Election Commission (EC) asked Congress not to "politicise" the armed forces, the party Friday said its criticism of the Agnipath military recruitment scheme was within the Model Code of Conduct, and alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "taking the support" of the poll watchdog.

Congress' ex-Servicemen Department chief Col (retd) Rohit Chaudhry said the model code states that the "criticism of other political parties when made shall be confined to their policies, programmes, past records and work".

The armed forces are doing a great job in protecting the country, and Congress was only talking about the policy of the government when it made statements on the Agnipath scheme, Chaudhry told a press conference at the AICC headquarters here.

He said Modi government has weakened the army by introducing the Agnipath scheme. "We are challenging the scheme which is not in the interest of the country, the army and the soldiers."

EC has asked not to make potentially divisive statements regarding armed forces PHOTO: PTI

Chaudhry said EC has written to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge that the party's star campaigners should not talk about the operational matters of the defense forces.

"Whenever Modiji gets into trouble, he looks for some support. Earlier, he used to hide behind the defence forces. Now he is taking the support of the Election Commission," the Congress leader said. "If our government is formed, the Agnipath scheme will be scrapped." This scheme has created discrimination in the Army and is also weakening the security of the country, Chaudhry alleged.

EC has asked not to politicise defence forces and make potentially divisive statements regarding the socioeconomic composition of the armed forces.

—*PTI*

Didi roasts PM on his 'sent by God' remark

KOLKATA, 24 MAY

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his 'sent by God' comment, albeit without naming the country's top leader.

Speaking at an election rally in Mathurapur in the Sunderbans area of South 24 Parganas district, she claimed that "faced with the phobia of a certain election defeat", BJP leaders were saying "all kinds of things that made no sense".

Dripping with sarcasm, Banerjee, in an oblique reference to Modi, said, "He is now calling himself the son of God. He claims that, unlike us, he doesn't have biological parents. He says he has been sent by God. I ask, does God send someone to orchestrate riots or spread lies through advertisements or jail people in the name of NRC exercise?"

Mamata Banerjee PHOTO: XXX

Her remark came in the backdrop of Modi's interview to a national TV channel where he reportedly said, "Until my mother was alive, I used to think I was born biologically. After her demise, when I look at my experiences, I am convinced that I was sent by God. This strength is not from my body. It has been given to me by God. That's why God also gave me the ability, strength, pure-heartedness, and inspiration to do this. I'm nothing but an instrument that God has sent."

Banerjee further ridiculed Modi for BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra's controversial remark about Lord Jagannath being a "devotee of the prime minister", which Patra had later retracted.

Reacting to Modi's comments Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also said that if an ordinary person had uttered this statement, that person would have been taken to a 'psychiatrist'. —*PTI*

Didi to move SC on OBC certificates

Kolkata, 24 May

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday announced that her government will approach a higher court, challenging the Calcutta High Court order that cancelled all OBC certificates issued in the state since 2010. She said the state government would appeal to the higher court against the order after summer vacation. Calcutta High Court struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in the state granted since 2010, sparking a political debate. —*PTI*

INDIA will name PM face in 3 days: Ramesh

CHANDIGARH, 24 MAY

Congress on Friday hit back at BJP over its "five PMs in five years" remark against the INDIA bloc, saying the alliance which is set to get a "clear and decisive" mandate in the Lok Sabha polls will have one person as prime minister for five years.

The name of the Prime Minister will be announced by the INDIA bloc within three days after the result of the elections is declared on 4 June, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh told a press conference here ahead of the sixth round of polling on Saturday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in his poll rallies repeatedly targeted the bloc, claiming that it has plans to have five prime ministers in five years if voted to power.

The INDIA bloc is going to get a "clear and decisive mandate" on 4 June and, like in 2004, history will repeat itself after 20 years, Ramesh said. BJP was unseated from power in the 2004 general polls despite its 'India Shining' campaign and the Congress-led UPA came to power.

Jairam Ramesh PHOTO: PTI

"Those who repeatedly raise the question who will be PM (if the INDIA bloc comes to power), I want to remind that in 2004, after Congress and its allies got the mandate, within three days Dr Manmohan Singh's name was announced for (the post of) Prime Minister," he said.

"This time it will not even be three days," Ramesh asserted and added that "one person will be Prime Minister for five years to run the government".

He said that the candidate will be selected in a democratic way by members of the INDIA bloc.

"Elections in our country are not a beauty contest. In our country, an election is between parties, our democracy is party-centric and not person-centric," Ramesh said. —*PTI*

BJP moves SC against order barring ads

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

BJP on Friday moved Supreme Court, challenging a Calcutta High Court order that refused to interfere with a single-judge verdict directing the party not to publish any advertisement violating Model Code of Conduct during the Lok Sabha election process.

The matter was mentioned for urgent listing before a vacation bench of Justice Bela M Trivedi and Justice Pankaj Mithal.

Advocate Saurabh Mishra, who mentioned the matter, told the bench that a division bench of the high court passed the order on 22 May.

"Why don't you move the next vacation bench?," the bench asked.

The counsel told the bench that the high court has restrained BJP from issuing advertisements during the Lok Sabha polls till 4 June. —*PTI*

YSRCP MLA gets interim protection

HYDERABAD, 24 MAY

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has granted interim protection till 6 June from arrest to "absconding" Macherla YSRCP MLA P Ramakrishna Reddy in a case relating to the smashing of an EVM, considering various reasons, including him being a candidate for the Assembly election.

On polling day – 13 May - Reddy, also the YSRCP candidate from Macherla Assembly seat, allegedly barged into polling station number 202 in the constituency and smashed an EVM.

This entire act was caught on a web camera installed by the Election Commission, leading to his identification with footage and documentary evidence.

CCTV camera footage caught the MLA damaging an EVM SCREENGRAB

The High Court passed the interim protection orders late on Thursday night, following a petition moved by Reddy seeking protection from arrest.

Finding merit in the MLA's argument that his presence as a contesting candidate is required on 4 June, when the votes will be counted, the court granted the interim protection. —*ANI*

EXCISE CASE 'FAKE'

PM has no proof in liquor scam: Kejri

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has acknowledged that the excise policy case is "fake" due to the lack of evidence and asked the Modi to release everyone who have been arrested in the matter.

Addressing a virtual press conference, he said the BJP has been screaming that there has been a scam but nothing was found during the raids.

"They(BJP) said a liquor scam happened and they arrested me, Sanjay Singh, Manish Sisodia. More than 500 raids were conducted but not even a single penny was recovered. Prime Minister said that evidence was not found because Kejriwal is an experienced thief," he said. He said that if there no proof, no recovery then leave all those who have been arrested. "So the Prime Minister confessed that he has no evidence in the liquor scam and to hide it he said that Kejriwal is an experienced thief...When you have already confessed that the entire liquor scam is fake, you have no proof, then leave all those who have been arrested," he added. Meanwhile, Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed the bail petitions moved by Sisodia. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

TALES FROM POLLS

SP faces battle against BJP in Azamgarh; strives to regain bastion

AZAMGARH, 24 MAY

The Azamgarh Lok Sabha constituency in Uttar Pradesh is gearing up for a high-stakes battle between BJP leader and Bhojpuri actor Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua' and Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate Dharmendra Yadav.

Azamgarh is all set to face a repeat of the same contest, with the two Yadavs in the fray again. The constituency, one of the 80 parliamentary constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, falls under the General category. Azamgarh constituency comprises five

SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav and wife Dimple Yadav PHOTO: ANI

Legislative Assembly segments: Gopalpur, Sagri, Mubarakpur, Azamgarh, and Mehnagar (SC).

Dinesh is running for the third time. A celebrated Bhojpuri actor and singer, he first won the MP seat by defeating Dharmendra in the 2022 byelection..

In the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, Dharmendra won from the Badaun seat in Uttar Pradesh. Despite facing a BJP wave in 2014, he managed to retain his seat defeating BJP's Vagish Pathak by over 1.6 lakh votes. He lost the seat in the 2019 polls, though.In the bypolls held in 2022, Dharmendra contested from Azamgarh, but ended up on the losing side. Dinesh managed to scrape through by a margin of just over 8,000 votes.. —*ANI*

It's a balancing act for TMC in BJP's Jangal Mahal stronghold

KOLKATA, 24 MAY

The Jangal Mahal region, recognized as Bengal's tribal belt consisting of five districts, will go to polls in the sixth phase on Saturday.

A hotspot for identity politics, the region sends eight representatives to the Lok Sabha from Tamluk, Kanthi, Ghatal, Jhargram, Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura, and Bishnupur seats.

Except in the Ghatal seat, which is represented by two-time MP and cine star Dev aka Dipak Adhikari and is still a stronghold of TMC, the politi-

PHOTO: PTI

cal equations have changed drastically in Purba Medinipur district where the Tamluk and Kanthi Lok Sabha seats are situated and were won by the Mamata Banerjee-led party in 2019.

The balance of power in the region shifted in favour of BJP following Suvendu Adhikari's switch in 2021.

Kanthi and Tamluk Lok Sabha constituencies exemplify dynasty politic.

In Tamluk, former judge of Calcutta High Court Abhijit Gangopadhyay is fighting on a BJP ticket against TMC's Young Turk Debangshu Bhattacharya.

In the last assembly polls, the TMC had bagged eight of the 15 Assembly segments spread across both the Lok Sabha seats in the Purba Medinipur district.

—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Man slits pregnant wife to find baby's gender, gets lifer

BUDAUN, 24 MAY

A fast-track court on Friday sentenced a 38-year-old man to life imprisonment for slitting his pregnant wife's abdomen to find the gender of their unborn child. According to the police complaint, in September 2020, Pannalal attacked his wife Anita, who was eight months pregnant with their sixth child, and cut her abdomen open with a sickle. The accused wanted a boy as the couple already had five daughters, the police said. Anita survived the attack but the child had to be aborted, they said. The doctors later informed the family that the aborted fetus was a boy, the police said. Additional District Government Counsel (ADGC) Munendra Pal told PTI on Friday that the police filed a chargesheet against Pannalal. *—PTI*

Actor's stepfather sentenced to death for murdering 6

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

Sessions court on Friday sentenced Parvez Tak to death in the 2011 murder of his step-daughter and actor Laila Khan, her mother and four siblings. Additional sessions judge Sachin Pawar had on 9 May found Tak guilty of murder and destruction of evidence, among other offences under the Indian Penal Code. The quantum of his sentence was decided on Friday. Tak was the third husband of Laila's mother, Selina. The actor, her mother and her four siblings were killed at their bungalow at Igatpuri in Nashik district of Maharashtra in February 2011. The killings came to light a few months later when the Jammu and Kashmir police arrested Tak. The decomposed bodies of the victims were recovered from the bungalow later. *—PTI*

Nurse found dead in UP, family alleges rape

SHAHJAHANPUR, 24 MAY

A 22-year-old nurse was found dead in a hotel room, with her family alleging that she was raped and then strangled, police said on Friday. The body of the victim, who worked at a private hospital here, was found inside the room by a hotel staff on Thursday evening, Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashok Kumar Meena said. An FIR has been registered and the police is investigating the incident, SP Meena said. According to the FIR, the deceased arrived at the hotel room with Shubham Shukla, who later left the room. The body of the victim has been sent for post-mortem and three teams have been formed to arrest the accused, the police said. *—PTI*

Ex-Tamil Nadu DGP Rajesh Das arrested

CHENNAI, 24 MAY

Former Tamil Nadu special DGP Rajesh Das was arrested on Friday for trespass and intimidation based on a complaint by his estranged wife, Beela Venkatesan, police said. Venkatesan, who is the state energy secretary, had alleged that Das and his associates had trespassed into her house at Thaiyur in the city's outskirts on 18 May after assaulting the security guard. A police official said Das has been arrested in connection with the plaint filed by Venkatesan on Monday. Last year, Das, who had served as special DGP during the previous AIADMK regime, was convicted by a court in Villupuram in a case of sexual harassment of a junior woman IPS officer. He had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment. In a recent order, the Supreme Court had provided him temporary relief. *—PTI*

SC junks plea on encroachment of houses in Manipur

SC says it cannot go by sentiments

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Supreme Court said on Friday it cannot go by sentiments and has to act in accordance with law, as it refused to entertain a petition seeking contempt action against officials for not protecting properties of people displaced during the Manipur violence. They said it was against the apex court's order.

A vacation bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said it was not satisfied with the contention that a case of contempt was made out against the respondents, including the chief secretary of Manipur, and the petitioners can take recourse to remedy which may be available under the law.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for Manipur, told the bench that no case of contempt was made out, and the state government and the Centre were on the ground doing everything they can to assuage public concerns.

The top court was hearing a petition claiming the respondents had committed contempt of its 25 September last year order on protecting the properties of those displaced during the ethnic conflict.

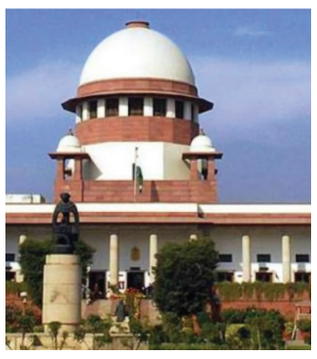


PHOTO: PTI

- A vacation bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said it was not satisfied with the contention that a case of contempt was made out against the respondents

"Who according to you are in contempt?" the bench asked the petitioner's counsel who said the chief secretary and others are.When the advocate said the petitioners are living outside Manipur and are not in a position to go anywhere near Imphal, the bench said, "That does not mean that notice be issued against chief secretary".

Bhati referred to 25 September last year order which said the state of Manipur and the Centre are given one week to respond to the directions, including on ensuring protection of properties of displaced persons and preventing their encroachment.

More than 170 people have been killed and several hundred others injured since ethnic violence first broke out in the state on 3 May last year when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for ST status. *—PTI*

RAIN VS HEATWAVE

Fishing nets are kept at a roadside at Poonthura coast amid rainy weather, in Thiruvananthapuram PHOTO: PTI

Orange alert for 3 districts in Kerala

T'PURAM, 24 MAY

Heavy rains continue to lash Kerala with parts of the state receiving over 200 mm of rain in the last 24 hours and places in major cities including Kochi and Thrissur remaining waterlogged on Friday.

As the southern state reels under the impact of heavy pre-monsoon rains, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) today issued an Orange alert for three districts.

An Orange alert has been issued for Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Idukki districts. Most of the shops remained shut and some of the adjacent roads were closed.

Local people have alleged that Aluva Municipality failed to clean the drainage resulting in the heavy waterlogging.A huge tree near the district hospital in Thrissur town was uprooted in the incessant rain last night leading to block.

Meanwhile, a cyclone Remal in the Bay of Bengal will make landfall between Sagar Island in West Bengal and Bangladesh's Khepupara on Sunday midnight, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday.

The Met office has warned of extremely heavy rainfall in the coastal districts of West Bengal and north Odisha on 26-27 May. Extreme precipitation may hit parts of northeast India on 27-28 May. *—PTI*

TEMP SIZZLES AT 48.8 DEGREE IN RAJASTHAN

JAIPUR, 24 MAY

The scorching heat continues in most parts of Rajasthan, and now even the nights are getting hotter. Due to the heatwave and scorching heat conditions on Friday, it became difficult for people to come out of their homes.

Night temperatures remained above 30 degrees Celsius in many parts of Rajasthan, the local weather office said on Friday.

The state recorded its highest temperature at 48.8 degrees Celsius in Barmer on Thursday, according Met Centre Jaipur.

Authorities in Kashmir issued an advisory on Friday amid soaring temperatures in the Valley, with Srinagar recording its hottest May day in 13 years.

The maximum temperature in Srinagar on Thursday was recorded at 32.2 degrees Celsius -- the same as on 25 May, 2013. On 20 May, 2011, Srinagar had recorded a maximum temperature of 32.3 degrees Celsius.

Thursday's maximum temperature was 7.4 notches above normal for this time of the season.

The Met office has forecast an isolated heat wave across the Valley over the next five days. *—PTI*

Naxalite killed in encounter with personnel in Ch'garh

NARAYANPUR, 24 MAY

A Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security personnel in a forest along the Narayanpur-Bijapur inter-district border in Chhattisgarh on Friday, police said.

The gunfight took place in the morning when a team of Special Task Force (STF) was returning after an anti-Naxal operation, a police official said.

The STF personnel were part of a joint squad of security forces that had gunned down seven Naxalites in an encounter in the Pallewaya-Handawada area along the Bijapur-Narayanpur border on Thursday.

After Thursday's encounter, security personnel were returning to their base when Naxalites fired on a patrolling team of the STF leading to a gunbattle between the two sides on Friday morning, he said.

After the firing stopped, the body of a Naxalite in 'uniform' was recovered from the spot, the official said, adding that further details are awaited.

Altogether, 8 Naxalites were killed in this operation which was launched on May 21, he added.

With the latest incident, 113 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters with security forces in the state. *—PTI*

8 Naxalites were killed in this operation launched on 21May PHOTO: PTI

7 killed, 20 injured as truck hits minibus in Ambala

AMBALA, 24 MAY

Seven people, including an infant, died and 20 were injured when a minibus collided with a truck here in the early hours of Friday, police said. The accident took place near Mohra village on the Ambala-Delhi Highway. The bus was carrying around 30 people from Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr who were going to the Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir. All of them were relatives, police said. Due to the impact of the collision, the front portion of the minibus was badly damaged. Seven occupants of the bus, including a six-month-old girl, died and 20 people were injured, they said. The bodies have been kept in a mortuary for post-mortem. The truck driver fled from the spot. A case has been registered against the driver and efforts are being made to nab him, police said. *—PTI*

B'DESH MP MURDER: BUTCHER HELD, HONEYTRAP LIKELY

KOLKATA, 24 MAY

West Bengal CID arrested one person from the state's Bongaon area in North 24 Parganas district for his alleged involvement in the "murder" of Bangladesh MP Anwarul Azim Anar, an officer said on Friday.

The man, a butcher by profession, has admitted during interrogation that he had helped the other accused in chopping the victim's body before disposing the parts in different locations, the officer claimed.

Bengal Police confirmed the murder the Anar, an Awami League MP from Jhenaidah-4 segment in Bangladesh, on Wednesday after the victim went missing from Kolkata on 13 May.

A woman who might have been used to "honey trap" Bangladesh MP Anwarul Azim Anwar before he was murdered in Kolkata has been detained in Dhaka. The woman, identified as Shilanti Rahman, is a Bangladeshi national and the girlfriend of the prime accused Akhtaruzzaman Shahin, Bangladesh police sources told India Today.

While police are yet to formally announce the motive of the crime, sources said Akhtaruzzaman killed the Bangladesh MP due to a dispute over some payments. Akhtaruzzaman paid around Rs 5 crore to those involved in the crime.

The arrested accused would be produced at a court in Barasat later Friday, he said. *—PTI*

AFTER TAIL SPIN

A helicopter with six pilgrims onboard made an emergency landing in Uttarakhand's Kedarnath after developing a technical snag early on Friday. All passengers were safe PHOTO: PTI

PORSCHE CRASH

Parents tried to blame driver, say cops

PUNE, 24 MAY

Pune police chief on Friday said there was an attempt to tamper with evidence to show that the Porsche that ran over two people on a motorcycle was being driven by a family driver and not the 17-year-old who is in custody over their deaths.

A court remanded Vishal Agarwal, father and five other accused in judicial custody till 7 June

The mother of the boy has appealed to the police to "protect" her son after a video purportedly featuring him, boasting about how he got away with the accident, went viral.

Staff of pubs protest after action against illegal pubs in Pune PHOTO: PTI

Parents of two software engineers killed demanded that the Supreme Court should monitor the probe and trial in the case. The excise department launched a crackdown on bars and pubs in Pune. So far, 32 establishments have been sealed by officials.

This has sparked a protest by these establishments' owners and staff. . *—PTI*

Toll hits 10; owners held in Thane blast

THANE, 24 MAY

The death toll in the chemical factory blast in Maharashtra's Thane district rose to nine with the discovery of one more body from the accident site, officials said on Friday.

Police have registered a case of culpable homicide against the owners of the unit, Amudan Chemicals. Dombivli chemical company where a blast killed nine and injured over 60 had not taken precautions over the mixing and storage of compounds knowing well that any lapses might lead to an explosion, FIR names company owners/ directors Malti Pradip Mehta, Mayal Pradip Mehta. They have been booked for culpable homicide, and others. *—PTI*

Hit-and-run: Kanpur teen sent to juvie home

KANPUR, 24 MAY

Amid the nationwide outrage over the Porsche hit-and-run deaths and calls for justice for the two IT professionals who lost their lives in the incident; Kanpur Police sent a minor son of a prominent doctor to a juvenile home after he allegedly rammed his father's car into persons, killing them in October 2023.

The police also initiated action against him in a separate hit-and-run case, in which the minor, who is yet to attain the legal age to drive, injured four people in the Barra area of Kanpur.

According to sources, a probe was also initiated against a section of the local police over their alleged inaction in the case. It was alleged that the minor was allowed to roam free despite being prima facie involved in the two hit-and-run cases.

Briefing reporters, the additional commissioner of police (Law and Order), Harish Chandra, said a departmental inquiry has been launched over the alleged delay in the filing of the chargesheet against the accused teen and acting against him. *—ANI*

DEVOTEE'S GIFT

Deities get air coolers at MP temples to beat the heat

CHHATARPUR, 24 MAY

Though it is believed that the Gods are above worldly sufferings like heat and cold, air conditioners (AC), coolers and fans have been installed near the idols at various temples in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district to provide relief to them from scorching heat and hot weather.

Chhatarpur is witnessing extreme heat these days and people are also staying indoors. The influx of devotees was reduced in the temples in the district as well due to the hot weather conditions.

"Devotees' visits to the temple have almost stopped. They come to offer prayers mostly till 11am and for around one to two hours during the evening after 6 pm. Besides, there is complete silence throughout the rest of the day as it is too hot here. Devotees have made arrangements of cooler, fan and AC for the deity in temple," said Rammilan, priest.

PHOTO: ANI

Similarly, Prem Mandir priest Rajendra Maharaj said, "The temperature is quite high in the region. The way previously there used to be a queue of devotees here from morning till evening, but they come till around 9:30pm only in the morning for the last darshan these days. During the evening hours too, devotees come to the temple only after 7pm due to the heat. In such a situation, we have installed AC, fan and coolers to protect the deity from the heat." *—ANI*

25 more Indians rescued from job scam in Cambodia

Indian nationals being brought home from Cambodia X@indembcam

PHNOM PENH, 24 MAY

In a successful rescue operation, 25 Indian nationals have been brought back to safety after being ensnared in a job scam in Cambodia.

These individuals traveled by Jetstar flight 3K592 at 21:30 on 23 May. Following their rescue, they are set to continue their journey up to Vishakhapatnam by Air India flight No. AI451 at 17:15 hrs on 24 May.

The rescue operation, which unfolded with the cooperation of Cambodian authorities, was facilitated by five consular/ embassy officials who provided crucial assistance to the Indian nationals.

The Embassy extended support to the victims' family members, offering counseling and facilitating communication with airlines for ticket purchases, hassle-free check-in, and immigration procedures. *—ANI*

6 killed as torrential rains batter Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, 24 MAY

Six people were killed in rain-related incidents in Sri Lanka as heavy monsoon showers battered the island nation on Friday.

The torrential rains also damaged some 1,346 homes and hampered train services in the country, officials said. Six people died in four districts after trees fell on them due to high wind and heavy showers, while over 34,000 people were marooned, the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) said. Eighteen of the 25 administrative districts have been affected by bad weather with heavy rains and gusty winds, it said. The DMC has issued severe weather warnings due to the activation of the north-eastern monsoon rains. *—AP*

Aus extradites ex-marine to US for aiding China

SYDNEY, 24 MAY

A Sydney judge on Friday ruled that former US Marine Corps pilot Daniel Duggan can be extradited to the United States on allegations that he illegally trained Chinese aviators, leaving the attorney-general as Duggan's last hope of remaining in Australia.

Magistrate Daniel Reiss ordered the Boston-born 55-year-old to remain in custody awaiting extradition. While his lawyers said they had no legal grounds to challenge the magistrate's ruling that Duggan was eligible for extradition, they will make submissions to Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus on why the pilot should not be surrendered.

The pilot has spent 19 months in maximum-security prison since he was arrested in 2022 at his family home in the state of New South Wales. *—AP*

Pak to pay $2.58M to kin of 5 Chinese killed in bombing

ISLAMABAD, 24 MAY

Pakistan has decided to pay USD 2.58 million to the families of five Chinese nationals killed in March when a suicide bomber targeted their vehicle in the troubled northwestern province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, according to a media report on Friday. The five Chinese and their Pakistani driver were killed when a suicide attacker rammed his explosive-laden car into a vehicle in the Bisham area of the restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on March 26 when they were being driven to a construction site of Dasu Hydro electric power station in Kohistan district of the same province. The Economic Coordination Committee of Pakistan's Cabinet on Thursday decided to pay USD 2.58 million to the families of Chinese workers slain in the attack, the Dawn said.*—AP*

PHOTO: BBC NEWS

Dogecoin dog Kabosu dies after 14 years as meme

TOKOYO, 24 MAY

Kabosu, the dog behind the "doge" meme, has died after 14 years of internet fame, her owner has said.

The Japanese shiba inu inspired a generation of online jokes and became the face of Dogecoin cryptocurrency. She had been suffering from leukaemia and liver disease and died on 24 May. In 2010, two years after adopting Kabosu from a puppy mill where she would otherwise have been put down, Sato, a teacher from Sakura, east of Tokyo, took a picture of her pet crossing her paws on the sofa. She posted the image on her blog, from where it spread to online forum Reddit and became a meme that bounced from college bedrooms to office email chains. The memes used goofy broken English to reveal the inner thoughts of Kabosu.
—BBC NEWS

Papua Guinea: 100 killed in landslide

The remote village is only accessible via choppers

Videos on social media showed residents pulling out bodies buried under rocks ***PHOTO: X/@GOODMORNINGAVL***

MELBOURNE, 24 MAY

At least100 people are believed to have been killed Friday in a landslide that buried a village in a remote, mountainous part of Papua New Guinea. An emergency response is underway, the South Pacific island nation's leader and news media said.

The landslide reportedly hit Kaokalam village in Enga province, about 600km northwest of the capital, Port Moresby, at 3 am, Australian Broadcasting Corp (ABC) reported. Residents said estimates of the death toll were above 100, although authorities have not confirmed that figure. Villagers said the number of people killed could be much higher. Videos on social media showed residents pulling out bodies buried under rocks and trees.

Elizabeth Laruma, who runs a women's business association in Porgera, a town in the same province near the Porgera Gold Mine, said houses were flattened when the side of a mountain gave way.

The landslide blocked the road between Porgera and the village, she said, raising concerns about the town's supply of fuel and goods.

Belinda Kora, a Port Moresby-based ABC reporter, said helicopters were the only way of accessing the village, which is in the mountainous interior region known as the Highlands, with the main road closed. Papua New Guinea is a diverse, developing nation of mostly subsistence farmers with 800 languages. There are few roads outside the larger cites. With 10 million people, it is also the most populous South Pacific nation after Australia, which is home to some 27 million.

Telecommunications are poor, particularly outside Port Moresby where government data show 56 per cent of the nation's social media users reside. Only 1.66 million people across the country use the internet and 85 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. *—AP*

'CAUGHT FIRE AFTER CRASH'

Iran rules out attack on prez Raisi's chopper

TEHRAN, 24 MAY

The helicopter carrying Iran's late President Ebrahim Raisi caught fire soon after it crashed into a mountain and there was no sign it was attacked, state media reported, citing the military's crash investigators.

The statement from the general staff of the armed forces in charge of investigating the crash was read on state television late Thursday. The first statement on the crash did not lay blame but said more details would come after further investigation.

The crash Sunday killed Raisi, the country's foreign minister and six other people.

The general staff's statement said the communications between the control tower and the crew of the helicopter before the crash contained nothing suspicious. It said the last communication of the crashed helicopter was between it and two helicopters accompanying it some 90 seconds before the crash.

The aging Bell helicopter went down in a foggy, remote mountainous region of Iran's northwest on Sunday. The crash site was discovered Monday morning with all eight on board dead.

Raisi was buried in a tomb at the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad on Thursday. *—AP*

The crash on Sunday killed Raisi and 7 other people ***PHOTO: AP***

22 suffer spine injuries after flight turbulence

SINGAPORE, 24 MAY

Twenty-two passengers from a Singapore Airlines flight that was hit by severe turbulence on Tuesday have spinal cord injuries and six others, including a two-year-old child, have brain and skull injuries, according to media reports on Friday.

Geoffrey Kitchen, a 73-year-old British passenger, died likely due to a heart attack on the Singapore Airlines (SIA) flight SQ321, operating from London (Heathrow) to Singapore.

Nearly 60 passengers were injured after the flight on 21 May encountered "sudden extreme turbulence over the Irrawaddy Basin at 37,000 feet about 10 hours after departure".|

The pilot diverted the Boeing 777-300ER carrying 211 passengers and 18 crew members to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, making an emergency landing.

Twenty people remained in intensive care, although none were life-threatening cases, reported The Straits Times, citing Dr Adinun Kittiratanapaibool, director of Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital in Bangkok.

The oldest patient at the hospital is 83, while the youngest is a two-year-old child who suffered a concussion.

Kittiratanapaibool said there were 40 patients at the hospital after the incident. The London to Singapore flight made an emergency landing in Bangkok. *—AP*

Gazans tortured in Israel prisons: Whistleblower

JERUSULAM, 24 MAY

Detainees were forced to stand up for hours ***PHOTO: THE GUARDIAN***

Prisoners held at an Israeli detention camp in the Negev desert are being subjected to widespread physical and mental abuses, with at least one case of a man having his limb amputated due to injuries sustained from constant handcuffing, said two whistleblowers who worked at the site.

The sources described treatment of detainees at the Israeli Sde Teiman camp, which holds Palestinians from Gaza and suspected Hamas militants, including inmates regularly being kept shackled to hospital beds, blindfolded and forced to wear nappies.

According to them, the facility, located 18 miles from the Gaza border, consists of an enclosure where up to 200 Palestinian detainees from Gaza are confined under severe physical restrictions inside cages, and a field hospital where dozens of patients with war injuries are handcuffed to their beds and often deprived of pain relief.

One whistleblower, who has worked in the facility as a prison guard, said detainees were forced to stand up for hours, or to sit on their knees. The source, who spoke out at risk of reprisals, said several detainees were beaten with truncheons and not able to move their heads or to speak at the facility.

"If they are unable to keep their hands raised, the soldiers attach the handcuffs to the bars of the cage. Many of the detainees had infected wounds that were not being properly treated."

He added: "The floor is very dirty, and it smells so bad that we were forced to wear face masks. You could hear sometimes the sound of beating and them screaming, and [a] banging sound like against the metal wall."

The whistleblower said prisoners were given one cucumber, a few slices of bread and a cup of cheese, and they were visibly malnourished.

The source claimed the military had no proof that detainees were all members of Hamas, with some inmates repeatedly asking why they were there. According to the whistleblower, most were considered suspects and some were released. Reportedly, 849 individuals classified as "unlawful combatants" were being held in its custody.

The source described the field hospital in the detention camp as consisting of tents with an emergency room where patients underwent surgery on a stretcher as there was no operating table. He claimed he was told that some patients had come from hospitals in Gaza. In one case, he said, he learned that a detainee's hand had been amputated "because the wrists had become gangrenous due to handcuffing wounds."

The prison guard's statements are corroborated by a second whistleblower who spoke to the Guardian and who was part of the medical staff operating in the field hospital in Sde Teiman.

The source said he witnessed a patient undergoing painful medical procedures without any painkillers.

Meanwhile, the bodies of three more hostages killed on 7 October were recovered overnight from Gaza, Israel's army said Friday. *—The Guardian*

AMID CHINA DRILLS

Taiwan protests bill aimed at curbing Presient's power

TAIPEI, 24 MAY

Protesters took to the streets in Taiwan as opposition lawmakers moved ahead with discussion of a bill intended to curtail the powers of the new President Lai Ching-te.

Thousands of people gathered outside the legislature in Taipei on Friday. Hundreds of people were also attending demonstrations in other cities around the democratic island of 23 million people.

Meanwhile, Taiwan tracked dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast on Friday on the second day of a large exercise China's People's Liberation Army held in response to the inauguration of the island's new leadership.

China has issued elaborate releases to media showing Taiwan being surrounded by forces from the ruling Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army. A new video on Friday showed animated Chinese forces approaching from all sides and Taiwan being enclosed within a circular target area.

Despite that, there was little sign of concern among Taiwan's 23 million people, who have under threat of Chinese invasion since the sides divided during a bitter and bloody civil war in 1949.

Taiwan's parliament was mired in a dispute between its political parties over procedural measures on Friday and business continued as usual in the bustling capital of Taipei.

The Defence Ministry said it tracked 49 warplanes and 19 navy vessels, as well as Chinese coast guard vessels, and that 35 of the planes flew across the median of the Taiwan Strait, the de facto boundary between the sides, over a 24-hour period from Thursday to Friday. *—Agencies*

China sends 1,500 tonnes water from Tibet to Male

MALE, 24 MAY

China has gifted 1,500 tonnes of water from the Tibetan glaciers to Maldives, the second such donation in less than two months, a media report said on Friday.

This is the latest in the multiple grants and aid that China has promised the Maldives, especially since pro-China Mohamed Muizzu took over as the President in November 2023.

China's Xizang Autonomous Region has gifted 1,500 tonnes of mineral water to the Maldives government on Thursday. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the donated water will be distributed to island communities, for use during times of drinking shortage, news portal Sun.mv reported.

Earlier on 27 March, the Maldives government had announced that it had received a similar consignment of 1,500 tonnes of water from China.

Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer, while speaking at a ceremony where Wang Lixin, the Chinese Ambassador to the Maldives, handed over the donation, said that China continues to remain a "good friend to the Maldives," especially during the challenging times and crisis.

The Minister also expressed his gratitude to the people of Xinjiang Autonomous Region for the kind gesture and to the government and people of China for their continued support and goodwill.

The Maldives has 26 atolls and its 1,192 islands are mostly composed of coral reefs and sandbars, a combination that makes groundwater and freshwater extremely scarce, and the problems are exacerbated due to climate change. *—AP*

Trump holds rally in South Bronx NY to woo Blacks

NEW YORK, 24 MAY

Former President Donald Trump campaigned on Thursday in one of the most Democratic counties in the nation, holding a rally in the South Bronx. This is as he tries to woo minority voters days before a Manhattan jury will begin deliberations on whether to convict him of felony charges in his criminal hush money trial.

Trump was addressing supporters in Crotona Park, a public green space in a neighbourhood that is among the city's most diverse and its most impoverished, a change from the majority-white areas where he holds most of his rallies.

The former president opened his rally with an ode to his hometown, talking about its humble beginnings as a small Dutch trading post before becoming a glamorous capital of culture that "inspired the entire world." Trump established residency in Florida in 2019. With Trump confined to New York for his trial for much of the last six weeks, the presumptive Republican nominee's campaign has planned a series of local stops across his hometown. *—AP*

FIRE IN HANOI APARTMENT KILLS 14

HANOI, 24 MAY

An overnight fire in an apartment building on a narrow alley in Vietnam's capital killed 14 people and injured six others, state media said on Friday.

The apartment building in central Hanoi could only be accessed through an alley just 2m wide, preventing firetrucks from reaching it, and firefighters eventually contained the fire by using hoses, state media said.

The fire started around 12.30 am and was accompanied by several explosions, the Vietnam News Agency said. It took an hour to extinguish.

State media reported the building had 24 residents at the time, seven in the owner's family and 17 tenants. The injured are stable and being treated at Hanoi Transport Hospital. The fire started in the small courtyard in front of the building that was used as a garage for the sale and repair of electric bikes, state media reported. The family would often charge the bikes' batteries at night. *—AP*

Pope clears sainthood for teen called 'God's influencer'

LONDON, 24 MAY

PHOTO: BBC NEWS

A London-born teenager - whose proficiency at spreading the teachings of the Catholic church online led to him being called "God's influencer" - is set to become a saint.

Carlo Acutis died in 2006, at the age of 15, meaning he would be the first millennial - a person born in the early 1980s to late 1990s - to be canonised. It follows Pope Francis attributing a second miracle to him.

It involved the healing of university student in Florence who had bleeding on the brain after suffering head trauma. *—BBC News*

A BLOW TO INDIA

India-UK trade pact may be pushed back till after polls

LONDON, 24 MAY

The prospect of an India-UK free trade agreement (FTA) has been kicked into the long grass after British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak surprised many this week with a snap summer poll on 4 July, exactly a month after India's election results on 4 June.

While political analysts and strategic experts have expressed confidence that very little should change on the bilateral relationship front whatever the outcome in either election, the very small window that was open for a deal being clinched by the Sunak-led Tory government has now been swept away in the election wave of both countries.

Rishi Sunak ***PHOTO: PTI***

The India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations opened in January 2022 and are aimed at significantly enhancing bilateral trade – currently worth around 38.1 billion pounds a year. The Opposition Labour Party, in the lead in most pre-election surveys, has committed itself to "finish the job" but the timelines will remain uncertain for some time.

"Rishi Sunak's shock poll date announcement of 4 July has skewered any prospect of the finalisation of the long-awaited and much-anticipated FTA with India by a Conservative government," said Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, Senior Fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy at International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty. On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles and lamb meat. *—PTI*

CHAD SWEARS IN PREZ, ENDING YRS OF ARMY RULE

DAKAR, 24 MAY

Chad swore in Mahamat Deby Itno as the President after holding elections earlier this month, completing a disputed transition to democratic rule after he seized power three years ago.

Deby Itno, also known as Mahamat Idriss Deby, took power on Thursday after his father Idriss Deby Itno was killed fighting rebels in 2021 after ruling the country for three decades. The long-delayed May 6 election came after three years of military rule. His main rival, Succès Masra, who contested the results earlier this month, resigned from his post as prime minister on Wednesday. Masra had been involved in protests against Deby Itno's decision to extend his time in power, and fled the country in 2022. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Rupee jumps to close at 83.11 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 14 MAY

The rupee rallied for the fourth consecutive trading session on Friday and appreciated by 18 paise to settle at 83.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on fresh foreign fund inflows and suspected intervention by the RBI. Forex traders attributed the rally to Rs 2.11 lakh crore record dividend by the RBI to the government for the fiscal ended March 31. It was more than double the budgeted expectation, helping shore up revenue ahead of a new government taking office. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 83.26 and moved in the range of 83.03 and 83.26 against the greenback during the session. *—PTI*

Gold tanks ₹900 to ₹72,650 per 10 grams

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Gold prices saw yet another steep fall on Friday and settled Rs 900 lower at Rs 72,650 per 10 grams in the national capital amid subdued trend in the global markets. The precious metal had plunged Rs 1,050 to close at Rs 73,550 per 10 grams in the previous session on Thursday, a day after falling marginally by Rs 50 on Wednesday. Extending its decline for the third day in a row, the yellow metal declined after stronger-than-expected US macroeconomic data, which reinforced bets that the US Federal Reserve would keep interest rates higher for a longer period, according to HDFC Securities.
Silver was also quoting lower at USD 30.45 per ounce *—PTI*

Google to buy stake in Flipkart in funding round

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Internet major Google has proposed an investment in e-commerce major Flipkart to buy a minority stake during the company's fresh funding round, the Walmart group firm said on Friday. "As part of the latest funding round led by Walmart, Flipkart today announced that it will be adding Google as a minority investor, subject to receipt of regulatory and other customary approvals by both parties," Flipkart said in a statement. The e-commerce firm, however, neither disclosed the amount proposed to be invested by Google nor the details of the fund being raised by the firm. "Google's proposed investment will help Flipkart expand its business and advance the modernisation of its digital infrastructure to serve customers ," Flipkart said.*—PTI*

Zee seeks $90 million fee from Sony

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Zee Entertainment Enterprises has sought a termination fee of USD 90 million (around Rs 748.7 crore) from the Sony Group for calling off the USD 10 billion merger deal in January this year. It has sought termination fees from two Sony Group entities -- Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), now known as Culver Max Entertainment, and Bangla Entertainment (BEPL), according to a regulatory filing from Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) on Thursday. ZEEL has, on account of Culver Max's and BEPL's breaches under the Merger Cooperation agreement (MCA), terminated the MCA by issuing a letter dated 23 May, 2024. The company has sought a termination fee from Culver Max and BEPL under the provisions of the MCA, it said. *—PTI*

Markets end lower after record peaks intra-day

The 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 7.65 points

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed marginally lower on Friday as investors booked profit in FMCG, IT and healthcare stocks after the BSE Sensex and Nifty hit fresh lifetime highs in intra-day deals.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 7.65 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 75,410.39. During the day, it rallied 218.46 points or 0.28 per cent to hit its all-time intra-day high of 75,636.50.

The NSE Nifty breached the 23,000 mark for the first time in early trade.

During the day, the benchmark climbed 58.75 points or 0.25 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 23,026.40. However, it pared all the gains and ended with a marginal decline of 10.55 points or 0.05 per cent at 22,957.10.

Markets were on a record-breaking rally for the second straight day ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls.

The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on 4 June.

From the Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, JSW Steel and ITC were among the major laggards.

On the other hand, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, Larsen & Toubro, NTPC, Axis Bank and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday after days of offloading equities. They bought equities worth Rs 4,670.95 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

The NSE Nifty breached the 23,000 mark for the first time in early trade PHOTO: PTI

- Markets were on a record-breaking rally for the second straight day ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were trading with cuts. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.73 per cent to USD 80.77 a barrel.

With nearly a fortnight left for the results of Lok Sabha polls, benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty zoomed more than 1.6 per cent to close at lifetime high levels on Thursday. *—PTI*

ADANI PORTS TO JOIN BSE

Adani recovers from Hindenburg report damage

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Shares of Adani Enterprises have bounced back to the pre-Hindenburg Research report levels and have hit a one-year peak in intra-day trade on Friday.

Hindenburg Research in a damning 24 January, 2023 report accused the Adani Group of "brazen stock manipulation" and accounting fraud, which led to a stock market rout that erased about USD 150 billion in the group firms' market value at their lowest point.

The conglomerate vehemently denied all allegations.

Shares of Adani Enterprises climbed 1.91 per cent to hit the 52-week high of Rs 3,456.25 at the BSE on Friday. It, however, ended flat at Rs 3,384.65.

Adani Group companies were in the limelight on Thursday, with the flagship Adani Enterprises rallying 8 per cent.

Shares of Adani Enterprises rallied for the fifth day in a row till Thursday, rising 11.51 per cent.

Adani Enterprises stock price was Rs 3,434.50 on 23 January, last year, a day before the report. From that level, the stock price went southward and fell to Rs 1,194.20 on 27 February, last year.

The company's stock price has now zoomed over 189 per cent from last year's February 27 level.

The combined market valuation of all the 10 listed group firms stood at Rs 17.23 lakh crore on Thursday. Adani Group's market capitalisation on Wednesday regained the USD 200 billion-mark (Rs 16.9 lakh crore) after its listed firms gained Rs 11,300 crore as investors reposed faith in the company denying any wrongdoing in the supply of coal to Tamil Nadu power company.

Gautam Adani Group firm Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone will replace IT major Wipro in BSE's benchmark index Sensex from 24 June, according to an official announcement on Friday.

The changes have been announced by Asia Index, a joint venture between S&P Dow Jones Indices and BSE. *—PTI*

AMID SOARING MERCURY

Peak power demand hits season's new high of 236.59 GW

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

India's peak power demand hit the season's new high of 236.59 GW on Thursday, due to soaring mercury levels in various parts of the country, which compelled excessive use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and coolers.

As per power ministry data, the peak power demand met or the highest supply in the day, was recorded at 236.59 GW on Thursday, which is the maximum so far in the summer season this year.

On Wednesday, the peak power demand had touched season's high of 235.06 GW, as per power ministry data.

The all-time high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023. The record is expected to be broken during this summer season.Earlier this month, the power ministry projected a peak power demand of 235 GW during daytime and 225 GW during evening hours for May and 240 GW during daytime and 235 GW during evening hours for June 2024.

Besides, the power ministry has also projected that peak power demand can hit the 260 GW mark during this summer season.The data shows peak power demand was 224.18 GW in April 2024, when the country witnessed the onset of the summer season in various parts of the country. It was 221.82 GW in March, 222.16 GW in February and 223.51 GW in January. During May, peak supply hit 233 GW on 6 May, and 233.80 GW on 21 May. It was 221.42 GW recorded in May 2023. *—PTI*

On Wednesday, the peak power demand had touched season's high of 235.06 GW PHOTO: PIXABAY

Wheat procurement has crossed last year's total

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Wheat procurement for the 2024-25 marketing year has surpassed last year's total of 262.02 lakh tonnes, boosted by strong contributions from the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, the government said on Friday.

In a statement, the government said 262.48 lakh tonnes of rabi (winter)-sown grain has already been purchased for the central pool, benefiting 22.31 lakh farmers, with a minimum support price outflow of Rs 59,715 crore.

The major procuring states were Punjab with 124.26 lakh tonnes, Haryana with 71.49 lakh tonnes, Madhya Pradesh with 47.78 lakh tonnes, Rajasthan with 9.66 lakh tonnes and Uttar Pradesh with 9.07 lakh tonnes.

Wheat procurement normally runs from April to March, but the Centre this year allowed states to make purchases based on crop arrivals. In most states, the procurement began in early March.

The government has set a wheat procurement target of 300-320 million tonnes for the 2024-25 marketing year. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

- The major procuring states were Punjab with 124.26 lakh tonnes, Haryana with 71.49 lakh tonnes

BIOCON INKS LICENSING, SUPPLY PACT WITH HANDOK

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Biocon Ltd on Friday said it has signed an exclusive licensing and supply agreement with South Korea's Handok for commercialisation of its complex drug product, synthetic
Liraglutide, used in the treatment of chronic weight management.

Under the agreement Biocon will undertake the development, manufacturing and supply of the drug product, and Handok, a specialty pharmaceutical firm, will be responsible for obtaining regulatory approval and commercialisation in the South Korean market, the company said in a statement.

Biocon CEO and Managing Director Siddharth Mittal said. Handok is amongst South Korea's leading firms in the management of diabetes, offering a host of solutions from diagnosis to treatment and care. *—PTI*

Sanjay Sharma is Air India's CFO

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Air India on Friday announced the appointment of Sanjay Sharma as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) with effect from 10 June.

Sharma will succeed Vinod Hejmadi, who is retiring after more than three decades with Air India.

In a release, the airline said Sharma has more than three decades of experience in the corporate finance, investment banking and real estate sectors.He was the CFO at Tata Projects Ltd. Earlier, he has served as the CFO at Tata Realty Infrastructure Ltd, and Managing Director, Head of Equity Capital Markets, at Deutsche Bank Group, among other roles."We are pleased to have Sanjay joining the leadership team and look forward to his contribution to the ongoing transformation at Air India. We also thank Vinod for his long service to the company, and for his vital role in its transition to private ownership," Air India CEO and MD Campbell Wilson said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Forex reaches record high of USD 648.7 billion

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

India's forex reserves jumped USD 4.549 billion to a new all-time high of USD 648.7 billion for the week ended May 17, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

This is the third consecutive week of increase in the overall kitty, which had increased by USD 2.561 billion to USD 644.151 billion in the previous reporting week ended 17 May.

For the week ended 5 April, the reserves had hit an all-time high of USD 648.562 billion following multiple weeks of increases.

In the week ended 10 May, foreign currency assets -- a major component of the reserves -- increased USD 3.361 billion to USD 569.009 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased USD 1.244 billion to USD 57.195 billion during the week, the RBI said.The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up USD 113 million to USD 18.168 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was down USD 168 million to USD 4.327 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. *—PTI*

Gold reserves increased USD 1.244 billion to USD 57.195 billion during the week PHOTO: PIXABAY

'JOBS REDUCED TO HOBBY'

Musk warns of AI taking over all jobs

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, stated that artificial intelligence (AI) will eventually eliminate all jobs, but he believes this is not necessarily a bad development, reported CNN.

Speaking at a startup and tech event in Paris on Thursday, Musk said, "Probably none of us will have a job,".

Elon Musk was speaking remotely via webcam at the Viva Tech event where he predicted a future where jobs would be "optional."

He said, "If you want to do a job that's kinda like a hobby, you can do a job." Musk added, "But otherwise, AI and the robots will provide any goods and services that you want."

Musk highlighted that for this scenario to succeed, there would need to be a "universal high income," which should not be confused with universal basic income, however, he did not elaborate much on this concept.

The Universal basic income (UBI) refers to the government providing a certain amount of money to everyone, regardless of their earnings.

"There would be no shortage of goods or services," Musk stated. He highlighted that AI capabilities have advanced rapidly over the past few years, advancing so quickly that regulators, companies, and users are still figuring out how to utilize the technology responsibly.

In the past also Musk expressed his concerns about AI. During his keynote on Thursday, he described the technology as his biggest fear. He cited the "Culture Book Series" by Ian Banks, a utopian fictionalized depiction of a society run by advanced technology, as the most realistic and "the best envisioning of a future AI."

Musk questioned whether people would feel emotionally fulfilled in a future without jobs.

"The question will really be one of meaning - if the computer and robots can do everything better than you, does your life have meaning?" Musk said.

He added, "I do think there's perhaps still a role for humans in this - in that we may give AI meaning."

He also advised parents to control and limit the amount of social media their children consume, saying that social media platforms "are being programmed by a dopamine-maximizing AI." *—ANI*

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has expressed his concerns about AI PHOTO: PTI

Indian content on Netflix crosses 1B views

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

Series and movies from India clocked over one billion views on Netflix in 2023 with "Jaane Jaan" the most watched film and "The Railway Men" the most watched series, the streaming service said on Friday in its second engagement report.

The report, titled "What We Watched: A Netflix Engagement Report", presented the streaming service's viewership data for the period of July to December 2023.

Subscribers across the world watched about 90 billion hours of content on Netflix in the second half of 2023.

From India, Sujoy Ghosh's "Jaane Jaan" was the most watched movie on Netflix with 20.2 million views, followed by Shah Rukh Khan's "Jawan" with 16.2 million views and Vishal Bhardwaj's "Khufiya" with 12.1 million views.

The other popular titles include "OMG 2" (11.5 million views), "Lust Stories 2" (9.2 million views), "Dream Girl 2" (8.2 million views) and true-crime documentary "Curry & Cyanide" (8.2 million views).

From the series that were launched on Netflix, "The Railway Men", starring Kay Kay Menon, Babil Khan and Divyenndu, turned out to be the top title. The series, set against the backdrop of the 1984 Bhopal Gas Leak, attracted 10.6 million views, followed by Suvinder Vicky and Barun Sobti-starrer "Kohraa" (6.4 million views), Raj and DK's "Gun and Gulaabs" (6.4 million views) and "Kaala Paani" (5.8 million views). *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

CBI closes case against ex-IOA chief Narinder Batra

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

After nearly two years of investigation, the CBI has closed a corruption case against former Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Dhruv Batra and Hockey India Executive Director Cdr R K Srivastava as it could not find evidence of wrongdoing against them, officials said Friday. The CBI had registered an FIR in the July 2022 case after its three-month-long preliminary inquiry report found prima facie material indicating "the commissions of cognizable offenses" relating to criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust, and corruption against Batra.—*PTI*

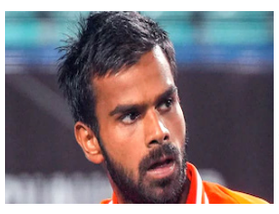


PHOTO: PTI

Nagal drawn against Khachanov in first round

ROME, 24 MAY

India's top-ranked singles player Sumit Nagal was handed a tough opening round at the French Open as he is set to face world number 18 Karen Khachanov of Russia here on Sunday. World No. 94 Nagal earned a direct entry into the main draw of the Grand Slam after his consistent performances on the tour. He became the first Indian male player to qualify for the French Open main draw since Prajnesh Gunneswaran in 2019.—*AP*

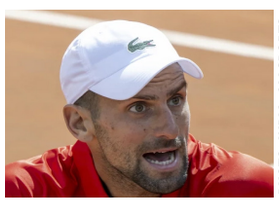


PHOTO: INDIA_ALLSPORTS

Novak Djokovic loses Geneva semifinals

GENEVA 24 MAY

Novak Djokovic will defend his French Open title in Paris still without a trophy this season after losing in the Geneva Open semifinals on Friday. The 44th-ranked Tomas Machac beat Djokovic 6-4, 0-6, 6-1 in the last clay-court event to prepare for Roland Garros, where main-draw play starts on Sunday. Djokovic's record in 2024 dropped to 14-6 overall and 0-3 in the semifinals, including at the Australian Open against Jannik Sinner.Machac took his first match-point chance which came on Djokovic's serve and clinched when the top-ranked Serb pushed a backhand long.—*AP*

King shines on home soil for West Indies

KINGSTON, 24 MAY

T20 World Cup co-hosts West Indies got on the front foot in their final preparations for the tournament with a commanding 28-run win over South Africa, their biggest margin of victory over them batting first. South Africa's much talked-about top order was reduced to 35 for 3 in the fifth over and neither Quinton de Kock nor Ryan Rickelton made it into double figures with the latter struggling to find the boundary. While West Indies hit seven fours and eight sixes in the first 10 overs, West Indies 175 for 8 (King 79, Baartman 3-26, Phehlukwayo 3-28) beat South Africa 147 (Hendricks 87, Motie 3-25, Forde 3-27) by 28 runs.—*AP*

Indian compound mixed team enters final

Deepika is in successive Archery WC s/fs post comeback

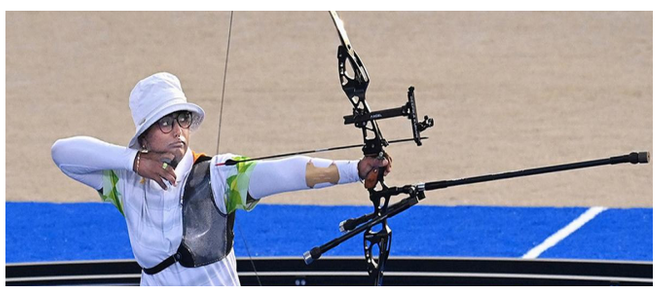
YECHEON, 24 MAY

Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Priyansh advanced to the compound mixed team final, confirming India's second medal, while Deepika Kumari brightened the country's gloomy recurve campaign, reaching her second successive Archery World Cup semifinals after her comeback in Stage 2 of the event, here on Friday.

The compound women's team of Jyothi, Parneet Kaur, and Aditi Swami had assured India's first medal by making the final on Wednesday.

Young compound archer Prathamesh Fuge is also eyeing a medal as he advanced to the semifinal in the individual category. Jyothi and Priyansh will face USA's Olivia Dean and Sawyer Sullivan in the gold medal match on Saturday in a clash of the top two world-ranked nations.

The fourth-seeded Indian duo earlier ousted Vietnam 159-152 in the first round of 16, missing the target only once from 16 arrows.



Deepika Kumari PHOTO: PTI

Former world number one Deepika, who is making a return to the International circuit after embracing motherhood in December 2022, secured four back-to-back wins to enter the last four stages and remained the only Indian recurve archer in the medal hunt.

Deepika will face home favorite and world No. 2 Lim Sihyeon in Sunday's semi-final, four weeks after the rising South Korean 20-year-old won the Shanghai Stage 1 gold in a ruthless straight-set victory.

Starting at fourth in the qualifications, Deepika overcame early jitters when she pipped Slovenian teenager Tinkara Kardinar in the shoot-off after 1-3 down in a dramatic first-round clash.

Deepika started out shooting twice in the red ring (8-8) to total 26 and lost the first set by two points. —*PTI*

T20 WORLD CUP

ICC announces star-studded commentary panel

DUBAI, 24 MAY

The ICC on Friday announced some of the biggest names in cricket and broadcasting, including former India coach Ravi Shastri and the legendary Sunil Gavaskar, as part of a robust commentary panel for next month's T20 World Cup.

The T20 World Cup will be co-hosted by the USA and the West Indies from 2 to 29 June.

Dinesh Karthik, who retired from all forms of cricket after his team Royal Challengers Bengaluru's IPL campaign, has also been named in the commentary panel list.

Leading the commentary team are stalwarts such as Shastri, Nasser Hussain, Ian Smith, Mel Jones, Harsha Bhogle, and Ian Bishop.

Adding to the insights on the modern game, the team will be joined by former men's and women's T20 World Cup champions such as Karthik, Ebony Rainford-Brent, Samuel Badree, Carlos Brathwaite, Steve Smith, Aaron Finch and Lisa Sthalekar.

Dinesh Karthik, Ravi Shastri, Harsha Bhogle, Sunil Gavaskar PHOTO: ANI

Former 50-over World Cup winners Ricky Ponting, Gavaskar, Matthew Hayden, Ramiz Raja, Eoin Morgan, Tom Moody, and Wasim Akram will also be lending their expert analysis to the upcoming tournament.

ICC appoints Shahid Afridi as ambassador

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has roped in former Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi as the latest name on the star-studded roster of ambassadors for the T20 World Cup 2024 in the USA and the West Indies which begins on 1 June.

Afridi joins T20 stalwarts Yuvraj Singh, Chris Gayle, and eight-time Olympic gold medallist sprinter Usain Bolt in the list of ambassadors for the showpiece event. —*PTI*

Shahid Afridi PHOTO:PTI

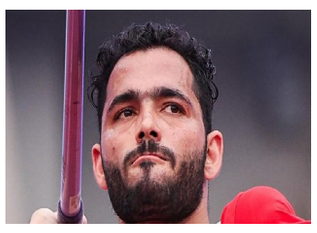
Rinku finishes 3rd in F46 javelin throw event

KOBE, 24 MAY

India's Rinku Hooda on Friday finished third in the men's F46 javelin throw event at the World Para Athletics Championship here but the result has been put on hold by the organizers after a competitor protested.

Rinku's fourth-round throw of 62.77m put him in third place, but Sri Lanka's Priyantha Herath (64.59m), who finished second, protested apparently against top-spot holder Guillermo Varona Gonzalez (65.16m) of Cuba.

"The Sri Lankan protested and that is why the result is yet to be declared official. In any case, a medal is assured for Rinku," head coach Satyanarayan told PTI.



Rinku Hooda PHOTO: PTI

Another Indian Ajeet Singh finished fourth in the 12-man final with a throw of 62.11m.

In a disappointment, however, India's world record holder and last year's Hangzhou Para Asian Games gold medallist Sundar Singh Gurjar, finished eighth with a throw of 59.03m. —*PTI*

Sindhu beats top seed Han Yue to reach SF

KUALA LUMPUR, 24 MAY

India's ace shuttler PV Sindhu sailed into the semifinals of the Malaysia Masters, BWF Super 500 badminton tournament, beating top seed Chinese Han Yue in three games, here at the Axiata Arena on Friday.

Sindhu, who is aiming for a first title since winning the Singapore Open back in 2022, registered a 21-13 14-21 21-12 win over world No.6 Yue, to whom she fell in three games for the first time at the Badminton Asia Championships in China last month.

This is the 28-year-old Indian's seventh tournament of the year. She returned from injury at the Badminton Asia Team Championships in February. Sindhu's slow and steady progress saw her make another significant step at Malaysia Masters as she reached her first semifinal in seven months. —*PTI*

PV Sindhu PHOTO: PTI

Shah denies approaching Aussies for coach job

MUMBAI, 24 MAY

BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Friday rejected claims that the Board has approached any former Australian cricketer to be India's next head coach and hinted that Rahul Dravid's successor could be an Indian by saying that he should have a "deep understanding" of the game's structure in the country.

While Dravid has reportedly told the board that he is not interested in a third stint, former Australian players like Ricky Ponting and Justin Langer have claimed that they have turned down approaches for the high-profile position.

"Neither I nor the BCCI have approached any former Australian cricketer with a coaching offer. The reports circulating in certain media sections are completely incorrect," Shah said in a statement.

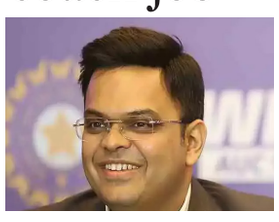
Both Ponting and Langer are involved in the Indian Premier League as the head coaches of Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants respectively.

World Cup-winning former batting star Gautam Gambhir, who is currently mentoring Kolkata Knight Riders, is speculated to be among the top contenders for the post right now.

"Finding the right coach for our national team is a meticulous and thorough process. We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian cricket structure and have risen through the ranks," Shah said.

Langer drops plan to coach India

Former Australian cricketer Justin Langer was enticed by the prospect of becoming India's head coach but KL Rahul's word of caution regarding the "pressure and politics" that come with the job dissuaded him from pursuing the "amazing" opportunity.



BCCI secretary Jay Shah PHOTO: PTI

Langer, who served as Lucknow Super Giants' head coach this IPL season, recalled a chat with franchise skipper and a senior member of the Indian team Rahul.

"You never say never. And the pressure of doing it in India...I was talking to KL Rahul and he said, 'You know, if you think there's pressure and politics in an IPL team, multiply that by a thousand, (that's) coaching India," Langer told the 'BBC Stumped' podcast.

"That was a good bit of advice, I guess. It would be an amazing job, (but) I have (put myself out of contention)," he added.

The BCCI has invited fresh applications for the head coach position, with a deadline set for May 27 as Rahul Dravid is set to exit after the T20 World Cup. —*PTI*

Justin Langer PHOTO: PTI

Senthilkumar, Abhay enter quarters

DOHA, 24 MAY

India's Velavan Senthilkumar and Abhay Singh entered the quarterfinals of the prestigious USD 53,500 QSF 3 squash tournament with stunning second-round wins over seeded opponents here.The tournament is a PSA World Tour Bronze event. Reigning national champion Senthilkumar defeated Egyptian seventh seed Omar Mosaad, a former world No. 3, 13-11 11-3 9-3 after the latter retired in 30 minutes due to an injury. Asian Games medallist Abhay then beat sixth-seeded Frenchman Auguste Dussourd 11-7 5-11 10-12 11-5 9-3, who also conceded his match in 59 minutes on Thursday.World No. 55 Senthilkumar will meet Egyptian top seed and world No. 8 Tarek Momen next, while Abhay, ranked 67 in the world, will take on Malaysian third seed and world No. 15 Eain Yow Ng. —*PTI*

V Senthilkumar PHOTO: PTI

SQUASH

Barcelona team applauds at the end of the UEFA Women's Champions League semi-final second-leg football PHOTO: X / @BARCELONAFCW

Barcelona seeks its first win against powerhouse Lyon

BILBAO, 24 MAY

Barcelona will need to find a way to get past the most successful club in women's soccer if it wants to build on its recent dominance in the sport.

The Catalan club will be playing in its fourth straight Women's Champions League final on Saturday in Bilbao against record eight-time champion Lyon, the nemesis it has never been able to beat.

The titleholders from Spain have a shot at a statement victory by finally overcoming the storied French club and winning its third European title all within a four-season span.

Lyon, meanwhile, will be hoping to reclaim the trophy after not getting past the quarterfinals last season and seeing the hype grow about Barcelona and its star players Alexia Putellas and Aitana Bonmatí, who have won back-to-back Player of the Year awards.

"We're coming up against a Barcelona team that is a tidy European side, and they are the holders, so we know, above all, to respect all of our opponents," said Lyon coach Sonia Bompastor, the first woman to win the title both as a player and coach.

"We know that all our rivals want to bring Olympique Lyonnais down a peg or two, so they're always very motivated," said Bompastor, who also can become the first woman to win two titles as a coach. "Now, we are very focused on ourselves. —*AP*

DELHI HC REFUSES TO INTERFERE WITH SHOOTER MANINI KAUSHIK

NEW DELHI, 24 MAY

The Delhi High Court on Friday refused to interfere with a single judge order dismissing a petition by shooter Manini Kaushik to allow her to participate in the trials for theupcoming Paris Olympics in the 50 m rifle 3 position women's category.

A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohansaid Kaushik's appeal challenging the decision of a single judge was infructuous as the trials have already been held."This is too late in the day. Your prayers areinfructuous. This is over," said the bench, also comprising Justice Manmeet P S Arora.At this stage, the selected players should be allowed to practice and participate, or else "India will suffer", itsaid." —*PTI*

CAN BCCI RETAIN HIM IN SET-UP?

Laxman's NCA stint ends in September

BENGALURU, 24 MAY

VVS Laxman's reluctance to become the Indian team's head coach is an open secret but with the former batting stalwart's stint as NCA's 'Head of Cricket' ending in September this year, it remains to be seen how BCCI manages to retain him in the set-up.

While Kolkata Knight Riders mentor Gautam Gambhir is believed to be the favorite among available options for the BCCI, it is still not clear whether Secretary Jay Shah has spoken to the national team's senior stars about Gambhir's unanimous acceptability. Shah, in a statement on Friday to deny reaching out to any Australian candidates, also dropped hints that the Board is looking for an Indian coach, who has come through the ranks and knows the cricketing ecosystem inside out.

VVS Laxman PHOTO: PTI

Laxman seems to be the most obvious successor given that the stylish former from Hyderabad has been an interim India coach during his nearly three-year stint at NCA (National Cricket Academy).

- VVS Laxman's reluctance to become the Indian team's head coach is an open secret but with the former batting stalwart's stint as NCA's 'Head of Cricket' ending in September this year, it remains to be seen how BCCI manages to retain him in the set-up.

But he hasn't applied for the post which will be both physically and mentally taxing for the next three and half years. The last date to submit applications is 27 May.It will be completely up to Jay but he has to convince VVS to be a part of the Indian set-up, at least when they play red-ball series," a former BCCI office-bearer told PTI on conditions of anonymity."

If he is not willing to work full-time, he can always be the consultant when India plays marquee red-ball series in Australia this year and England next year."It is understood that it won't be very difficult for Laxman to go back to the IPL fold after his NCA stint ends as he has a standing offer from at least one franchise. He is also an established commentator-cum-analyst." Unlike Rahul (Dravid), who was based out of Bengaluru, Laxman had to shift base from Hyderabad. —*PTI*